ゼロの使い魔
11
〈追憶の二重奏〉
ヤマグチノボル
MF文庫
J

Novel Illustrations

ヤマグチノボル（やまぐち・のぼる）

1972年2月、茨城県生まれ。『カナリア―この想いを歌にのせて』（角川スニーカー文庫）でデビュー。著書に『グリーングリーン 緑ノ音ファンタスティック』『つっぱれ有栖川』『魔法薬売りのマレア　千日カゲロウ』『ストライクウィッチーズ』（角川スニーカー文庫）『描きかけのラブレター』（富士見ミステリー文庫）『サンタ・クラリス・クライシス』『富士見ファンタジア文庫』『グリーングリーン 緑ノ音スタンド・バイ・ミー』（MF文庫J）など多数。『グリーングリーン』『Gonna Be??』『ゆきうた』『私立アキハバラ学園』『魔界天使ジブリール』『そらうた』など、ゲームシナリオライターとしても活躍中。

Illustration

◎ **兎塚エイジ**（うさつか・えいじ）

8月16日生まれ、大阪出身、大股な女の大股人。
現在、イラストレーターをしながらイラストを描かせて頂いてます。
イラスト仕事歴は
「遙士さんちゃんと」（電撃文庫）
「ふたりはなめこぐる」（電撃hp）
「神曲奏界ポリフォニカ えまる・じょうる」（GA文庫）
「悪魔祓師の日常的」（富士見文庫）
「ゼロの使い魔」シリーズ（MF文庫J）
などです。

カバーイラスト／兎塚エイジ　装丁／tkub

ゼロの使い魔11

追憶の二重奏

ヤマグチノボル

MF文庫J
や-01-13

ISBN978-4-8401-1859-0
C0193　¥580E

9784840118590

1920193005806

定価：本体580円（税別）
メディアファクトリー

580

ゼロの使い魔11　追憶の二重奏

使い魔として異世界ハルケギニアに『召喚』されてしまった高校生・才人は、ご主人さまのルイズとともに、ガリアに囚われていたタバサを無事に救出。隣国ゲルマニアでつかの間の休息をとっていた。ルイズは『才人に好かれている』という自信をつけ、二人はちょっといい雰囲気なような、でも素直になれない状況が続いていた。そんな中、ルイズはアンリエッタへ向けてお詫びの手紙を出し、やがてその返信が届く。ルイズの故郷ラ・ヴァリエールに来るようにと指示され、なぜかルイズは激しく怯えはじめる。理由のわからない才人は楽観視していたが、待ち受けていたのは……!?　大好評の異世界使い魔ファンタジー、新展開を迎える11巻！

MF文庫J　ヤマグチノボルの本

グリーングリーン 緑ノ音スタンド・バイ・ミー
［原作・監修／GINOVER　イラスト／くろま舞台］

ゼロの使い魔［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔2 風のアルビオン
［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔3 始祖の祈祷書
［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔4 契約の水精霊
［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔5 トリスタニアの休日
［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔6 聖霊の炎赤石
［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔7 虚の降臨祭
［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔8 望郷の小夜曲
［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔9 双月の舞踏会
［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔10 イーヴァルディの勇者
［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔11 追憶の二重奏
［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔外伝 タバサの冒険
［イラスト／兎塚エイジ］

ゼロの使い魔 11

〈追憶の二重奏〉

ヤマグチノボル

＊INDEX＊

＊第一章
フォン・ツェルプストー …… 11

＊第二章
女王と公爵 …… 31

＊第三章
烈風カリン …… 47

＊第四章
ラ・ヴァリエールの家族 …… 63

＊第五章
新学期 …… 106

＊第六章
個人授業 …… 125

＊第七章
ロマリアの教皇 …… 152

＊第八章
ヨルムンガント …… 166

＊第九章
ウエストウッドの再会 …… 192

＊第十章
二重奏の心 …… 217

エピローグ …… 255

•キュルケ
タバサの親友の、情熱的な少女。「微熱」の二つ名を持つ。今はコルベール先生に夢中。
•ティファニア
アルビオンで才人を助けてくれたハーフ・エルフ。優しい性格で、争いを好まない。
•ルイズ
才人のご主人さま。伝説の系統「虚無」を使うことができる。貴族としてのプライドのためか、才人には素直に接することができないでいる。
•平賀才人(サイト)
ルイズの使い魔として召喚された高校生。現在はトリステインから騎士の身分を与えられている。
•タバサ
「雪風」の二つ名をもつ、風系統の魔法を得意とする少女。実はガリアの王族のお姫さまでもある。

ゼロの使い魔11
追憶の二重奏

ヤマグチノボル

MF文庫
J

Chapter One: Von Zerbst

Within the deep, dark woods of Germania stood Von Zerbst Castle. But even though it was called a castle, it was considerably different from the Tristanian ones.

The old stone-made building probably had a splendid history, and the repeatedly added random extensions increased its original size twofold. The architectural style was uncertain as well. The rising top looked of ancient Tristain and Gallia, the high steeples belonged to Varon's style, while the middle wall underwent a massive transformation under Albion's architectural influence.

Next to the delicate Romalian brick tower stood a large Germanian citadel made of massive rocks… Thus, ignoring the looks and prestige, this building was a mess. Tristain's and Gallia's nobles furrowed their eyebrows upon seeing such a castle, and the respective liberty and innovation of Germania, the Country of Fire, made them frown deeply.

In this castle, within a room devoted to the cheerful and warm feeling of spring, Saito was sound asleep. Because he had just taken part in a big adventure, his body felt very tired.

In his deep sleep, Saito was dreaming. It was a nostalgic dream.

A dream of his hometown. A dream of Earth…

His mother was cooking in the kitchen, and he watched her from behind.

"Mother, what are you making?"

"Your favorite - hamburger steak."

For some reason, such a casual conversation pierced hard through his chest. His mother turned around. Her familiar face. The same gentle, calm face of his

mother...

“Saito, you, why are you crying?”

“Huh?”

Saito rubbed his eyes. They were full of tears.

“Such a strange child.”

Said the smiling face of his mother as it changed into the face of Tabitha’s mother. Surprised, Saito let out a cry.

“Uwaa!”

Saito woke up from his yell.

“A dream…”

It was already the second dream of his mother. Being so far away, it was a wonder he could recall her face at all.

Saito rose from bed and looked out of the window. The sun had already gone halfway. The bed next to him, where Malicorne and Guiche should have been sleeping, was empty. No one had slept in it for some time.

Saito dressed and turned to leave the room…

“Saito.”

Louise stood in the doorway.

“Oh, Louise. Good morning.”

For some reason, Louise shyly cast her eyes down when Saito greeted her.

“Lunch has been prepared. Everyone is waiting.”

“You should have woken me up then.”

“I tried. But you would not wake up.”

“I-I see. Sorry.”

Saito said looking away. He became embarrassed remembering the dream. It may have been a journey deep in the dream world, but the dream of his mother was strangely embarrassing.

Both Tabitha and her mother had been saved from Gallia‘s old castle five days ago. The previous night, they had arrived at Kirche‘s family's, the Von Zerbst’s, residence in Germania. Louise and Saito, Kirche, Guiche and Montmorency, Malicorne, Tabitha and her mother; overall - eight people and Sylphid managed to safely cross the border.

Gallian military, after learning that Tabitha and her mother went missing, placed checkpoints along the highway, checking passing travelers, but on every such point Sylphid would transform and Guiche would cast a spell pretending to be an important person, thus fooling the check.

Because the local Gallian army had fallen into disorder, it was easy to escape the line. The morale of local soldiers who stood in the check was low. Some soldiers would not even do a proper check on carriages, before mumbling the unmotivated "Go." The Kingdom of Gallia apparently did not care about prefectures too much, often excluding the army‘s direct control.

The best troops were placed on the border with Germania. Calling themselves the Knights of Roses, were a squad of elite knights placed there.

The party was nervous.

When they thoroughly rummaged the carriage, they found the disguised Tabitha.

Make-up was wiped from the face of the sleeping Tabitha,

“This girl…”

It was the young leader of the knights, who introduced himself as Castelmorr.

That moment, Kirche grasped her wand and Saito pulled out his sword.

However, Castelmorr got out of the carriage and loudly proclaimed,

“All clear! You may pass!”

Border passage was permitted. When the carriage crossed the border, they sent their expression of gratitude to the splendid knight. He, who should have captured Tabitha, Saito, and others, had let them go.

When Tabitha woke up and they told her about the incident, she just calmly said “I see.”

“Even though he was not an ally, he was not an enemy either. I was relieved.”

Saito recalled the conversation upon crossing the national border and nodded.

“Tabitha?”

“She is asleep in the room over there.”

Louise, from the room prepared for them, pointed to the door across the corridor in front of them. Saito nodded and slightly pushed the door. It was not locked. Making a slight sound, the door opened.

From the opening, Saito glanced into the room.

Mother and child, hugging each other tight, were sleeping soundly on the big bed.

Tabitha and her mother had been saved by Saito and the others.

“Anyway, they are finally safe.”

Louise, who stood by his side, nodded.

“Oh well. Besides, this is Germania… Gallia can’t do much here.”

Saito nodded and, feeling uneasy, asked,

“Hey, yesterday, when you sent the letter…”

The previous night, Louise sent a letter addressed to Henrietta in Tristain by owl. It was filled with Louise’s lengthy apologies.

First, it began with a report that Tabitha had been rescued safely, followed by an apology for crossing the border without permission; secondly, a statement of her willingness to take any punishment needed and the hope to return within three days' time.

“You didn't write about my arrest, did you?”

Though he watched closely as Louise wrote the letter, because he did not understand the characters, he could not understand the content. Louise would not take his crimes for herself, would she? He thought, and asked tentatively.

“Not really.”

Louise responded with a calm face.

Saito looked deeply into Louise’s eyes for a while. They were filled with little shining sparkles.

“Really? Aren’t you lying this way? It all started because of me; thus, it is me who should bear the responsibility…”

For a moment, Louise’s sparkling eyes lost their light as she fixed her sight on Saito.

“If you are caught, then you won’t be able to return…”

“Hey! That’s true, but… I am responsible as a sub-commander of the Knight Corps…”

Saito had changed recently. When he was talking about "responsibility" or "what he can do in this world," it all was making Louise perplexed. Didn’t he want to return to his world?

“Yeah, yeah. That story is already over. Let’s go, everyone is waiting.”

Saito, before turning to leave, peeked one last time as Tabitha snuggled closer to her mother. Then… something deep in his heart became strangely numb.

“What’s wrong?”

“N-Nothing.”

Saito and Louise left the mother and child asleep, and went to everyone who had been waiting in the dinning room.

While in the corridor, seeing the Von Zerbst castle’s furniture, Louise started complaining,

“Pshh, it’s the first time I have seen a residence with such a bad taste.”

Even so, Saito did not know a thing about the quality of the furniture in Halkeginia’s castles anyway. Well, it had a lot of Tristainian statues and paintings lined up.

“Making this corridor in the manner of Tristain and then for some reason placing these paintings from the east in it. Meaningless. Or perhaps rather than stressing over the eastern paintings, I should be angrier about the mimicry of Tristain to begin with. Either way it’s retarded.”

Louise pointed at the image of a God with many arms. For a moment it looked like a statue of the goddess of mercy with one thousand hands that Saito saw during a school excursion. Apparently, Louise could not forgive such casual decorating manner in using the furniture of her hometown.

“Look, this is Giovanni Lascault’s religious painting. Its tint completely mismatches the color of the wall. Ugh, these upstart nobles of Germania…”

As Louise continued fuming about, Saito said in an embarrassed voice,

“Umm, Louise.”

“Huh?”

“Walls, statues, paintings – they all are alright… But this… Look of yours…”

“What’s wrong with my look?”

Tsun – Louise turned around to face him and asked.

“…You didn't take your dancer costume off?”

Underneath the mantle Louise was still wearing the same oriental dancer clothes that she wore while saving Tabitha.

With all its worth, these clothes were designed only to conceal the most pivotal points, and it was embarrassing, whatever exposed place he guided his eyes on.

“Reluctantly so. It's the only clothing I have to wear.”

For some reason, when Louise said that, her voice sounded triumphant.

“Argh! Put on the clothes you wore before changing to it – the Academy of Magic school uniform!”

“That? It’s dirty, so out of the question. I won’t put it on.”

“This is dirty in a different way! There!”

Saito shouted while turning his eyes away from Louise. Seeing her like that was making him feel nervous.

“That, isn’t this Kirche’s family house? That sort of attire is very suitable for Kirche's family as it seems from the looks of the servants.”

Just then, a young female employee wrapped in showy red clothes happened to pass by.

Louise calmly hid her body behind the mantle. Indeed, this way, Louise's slender limbs were completely hidden.

“Hey, she can’t see you that way!”

Once the employee passed, while giving a quick bow, *swish* - Louise provocatively swung the edge of her mantle, exposing the silky skin of her thigh. A teasing smile formed on her pink lips.

Swish-swish More of Louise's white skin caught Saito's eyes, making him color up and turn his face away.

"S-Stop it… Your mantle fluttering like that…"

This made Louise's face blush deeply, yet she continued to stare at him.

"Why?"

"W-Why, well, you, uh, looking like that…"

"Looking like what?"

"Skin and stuff…"

"Are you stuuuupid? Are you excited just by looking at your master's body? Unbelievable! How vulgar! You should die. In the forest."

Blushing, Louise declared.

"Do you have any sense of shame?!"

"S-Shame for what! There's nothing wrong with being seen by a familiar!"

Louise countered in a flurry.

Firstly, in the carriage, Saito's feverish gaze when he looked at her dancer's clothing, was very amusing. But as if showing was not satisfying enough, she went up with the whole provocative ending.

However, trying to act calm was extremely embarrassing. *What the heck was I thinking about – after everyone fell asleep*, Louise raged wiggling in her blanket. She raged and raged, continuing to worry and worry more.

What would God think, seeing her present act?

Not just God, but Chii-nee-sama too?

While thinking so, cheeks burning from shame, Louise cursed herself.

While within the carriage, her distress continued… Louise pondered.

Though it was shameful to death, it also felt good.

Aah, his gaze, solely focused on me and not on the other girls — that felt really good. By all means, I should wear these dancing clothes more. It was embarrassing, but this strange feeling of triumph was stronger than the feeling of shame.

“Stop scrutinizing so much. Anyway, there's no ulterior motive and no deeper meaning to this. I’m just wearing what I want to wear.”

Louise said in an angry voice. Though in truth it made her feel wonderful and glad, it would make her very furious if he realized that; although she could not say why it would make her mad. With such contradictions struggling within her heart, Louise continued to speak.

“Stop looking so intensively at me. Haah, what’s a life-form not given by birth? You.”

Naturally, Saito’s pride was severely damaged by such words. Saito turned his neck to the other side, thus completely averting the glance from Louise.

“Who's looking?”

The two walked silently for a while. Eventually, missing his gaze, Louise started to lose her temper. It was so trivial.

Finding the mirror put on the wall, Louise halted in front of it.

“Who is this cute girl?”

“Hey, move on.”

“I think that’s me.”

“Yeah yeah.”

Saito kept his head turned to the other side. Louise was growing increasingly angry. In her mind she started repeating strings of angry words. *Loveyouhesaidloveyouhesaidloveyouhesaid*.

Whyishepretendingnottoseewhyishepretendingnottoseewhyishepretendingnottosee

Irritated, Louise went for her secret trump. She placed her delicate finger on her cheek.

“I wonder.”

“H-Hey, let's go.”

Nervous, Saito urged Louise. As always, he was looking at the opposite direction. *Kaaaaan* – a lot of blood went up to Louise’s head. *I’m acting so cute, I’m acting so cute and yet... Can’t let that happen*. Louise's pride was as high as a mountain and blood soared to her head. Result: Louise’s temper broke loose.

“B, B-B-B, B-B...”

“B? What about it?”

“B, B-B-B-B-B, my breast cloth, i, i-i-i, i-i, if I remove it, w-w, wonder how I would look. Sex appeal increases cuteness, no doubt.”

“HAAH?!”

“There’s no doubt. Sex appeal easily attracts my familiar.”

Saito, determined not to lose, stood his ground. It was like this in his head – looking at Louise now would mean her victory and his defeat. Thus, with his right hand he pinched himself, desperately fighting against the overwhelming desire "to look."

“Then the b-b-breast cloth w-w-w-will go.”

“T-take it off then. Th-that kind of stuff, no-nobody would even want to look at it.”

“So be it then.”

“So be it.”

“I'm taking it off now, okay.”

Saito applied more power to the finger digging into his thigh. From the pain, cold sweat flowed. Seriously, flowed.

However, he wouldn’t look. A man decided not to look; so, he won’t look.

Louise gave a lot of care to the cloth which covered her chest. "Move," but the hand wouldn’t move even if ordered. It was shameful. No, shame was not the only thing. Death. Her head would explode and she would die from shame.

But if she took it off...

While she should be able to reclaim her position as a noble from the Queen herself, her pride as a noble would be lost forever. Since that would be the case, she must fix her familiar's eyes firmly on her body or she would regret it.

Even though she was confused, because blood went up her head, Louise didn't notice such thing. Her pride was driving her insane.

“Waah!”

With a shout she lowered her breast cloth.

Saito was surprised. Even if he were not surprised, the moment when Louise shouted, his head moved on its own, disregarding his intentions. And thus, his head graciously turned to Louise.

The first thing Saito’s eyes jumped on was the pulled-down fabric of the dancing costume, covering the breasts, Louise’s slender fingers covering the exposed top of her breasts… which looked rather plain.

Saito, with a reflex speed at the insect level, jumped at Louise. And clung close to her.

“Sorry, can’t help it.”

Recovered from her daze, Louise gripped the back of Saito’s head and tried to pull him off.

“W-Wait a minute… stop! W-W-W-What are you thinking…?”

Then she saw Saito’s feverish eyes. W-What a look. Such a crazy passion that she, she… contrary to her will, Louise closed her eyes.

“W-We… are very likely to be imprisoned when returning back to Tristain, right?”

“…R-Right.”

Then a painful thought pierced Louise's mind. If… she were to be put into prison for all this…

Then she would not be able to meet Saito for a while.

“…then if so, maybe it’s the only time we can be alone as a couple?”

After those words… the time spent held firmly in Saito’s arms felt irreplaceable. Those thoughts, and Saito’s passionate look, deprived the last remains of the strength from her resisting hand.

“I-Is it alright?”

Louise, still nervous and shy, slightly parted her lips and puckered them up.

“S-Stop a-asking, idiot…”

Louise, looking very shy, was so lovely at this moment, that Saito’s head started spinning.

He hugged her close to him.

Louise’s mind was in a turmoil.

Aah, I am sorry ancestor-sama. Louise Françoise is about to be swept off her feet in the bitter enemy Von Zerbst's castle. When I passed through the gates, I never thought it would lead to this. I am sorry ancestor-sama, mother-sama, elder sister-sama, Chii-nee-sama – everyone – I am sorry…

The passion was so strong that her mind started to leave, fading away…

But then, with the corner of her eye, she noticed red hair moving across the corridor. Louise's reaction was blitz-quick. She kicked Saito in the groin and

quickly leaped back to her feet.

“Because you were both missing for so long, I came to check up on you.”

Guiche put a hand on his chin and shook his head.

“You, what are you doing in other people's homes?” Kirche asked, not hiding the amazement in her voice.

Louise’s mouth opened and closed few times, vaguely trying to remember any letter of the alphabet to utter. She shivered while cold sweat dripped down her skin.

“ An i-insect leeched to my neck so I tried to take it off.”

“And of course for that you needed to take off your breast cloth?” Kirche asked with a malicious smile.

Louise’s body stiffened. Slowly, she dropped on her knees and her shoulders sagged.

Meanwhile, Saito was busy twitching on the floor.

Kirche approached Louise. She placed a hand on her shoulder, mischief was dazzling from her smile.

“Had enough of your lustful antics? And I thought no one would best me.”

“T-That’s not it, it has nothing to do with lust. It kind of shifted on its own!”

Shaking her temple, Louise came off with a desperate excuse.

“It’s alright. I have a gift for you.”

“Not needed.”

“It’s a letter from Tristain.”

The party, with tensed faces, gathered in Kirche’s room.

“Extremely soon.”

“Surely, it must be because she is so very angry, that queen of your country.” Said a relaxed Kirche as she spread her hands.

Louise carefully eyed the letter that Kirche passed to her. The envelope was made from high-class parchment and had the Kingdom of Tristain’s signature placed on it. The Crest of Lilies that she got used to seeing… a reply from Henrietta so soon.

In this letter, mine and the others’ fates are written. How did Henrietta judge me?

Her hand trembled from the tension. Saito watched her face nervously as well. Guiche, Montmorency, and Malicorne held their breath too, watching Louise's act.

Kirche carefully said to Louise, who was still not breaking the seal,

“Hey Louise, you know about that letter. It is not necessary to return to Tristain. You can stay in my house.”

“You aren't worried about our teacher, Colbert?”

Colbert volunteered to take Louise’s and the others' place so that they could pass the border.

Afterwards, there was no news from him. Even the crew of the *Ostland* that arrived at Von Zerbst had no information.

“If it’s Jean, then it will be alright. Surely, he hid himself somewhere. The report will come sooner or later. But if he were caught, then I would go on another rescuing adventure.”

“No good. It would be much tougher than before.”

Then Louise took a deep breath and opened the envelope in a dash. The letter inside had just a single piece of paper. And a short sentence was written in there. Reading it, Louise started to tremble.

“W-What is it?! What’s written in there!?”

Saito pressed her, unable to endure the tension any longer.

“Just this much was written? And more importantly, what is written on that? Give it to me.”

Kirche took the letter from Louise’s hand.

“What, 'Henrietta will wait at the La Vallière estate.' My, isn’t that good. She will wait at your family's home. Maybe it won’t be so tough there.”

Kirche said pretending not to know. Louise’s shivering reached its peak. She just managed to utter.

“At home...”

“Why? Isn’t it good if you can speak with your family - they might protect you.”

“Far from protecting, I will be killed.”

As if giving up, Louise lowered her head.

Chapter Two: The Queen and the Duke

In the workroom of Tristain‘s Royal Palace, the Queen worried alone. She had just sent a letter to Louise in Germania.

She was relieved and happy that her friend was safe, but though it had not turned out badly, she still felt uneasy.

“Right now, for Gallia, this doesn’t mean a thing…”

Fuh – she let out a long sigh, just as a knock came from the door.

“Who is it?”

“It’s me, Your Majesty.”

It was Musketeer Commander Agnes.

“Aah, you came at a right time, Commander.”

Henrietta stood up and opened the door. Agnes and a few of her troops stood there, prideful and hard as steel. The Queen showed a thankful expression.

“Please choose a few trusted subordinates and get ready to go.”

“We are prepared to leave anytime. Your Majesty has only to tell us where.”

Interrupted by one of Agnes’ eager soldiers, Henrietta gave a slight smile.

“To the La Vallière estate, then. Since it is an informal visit, please prepare a suitable coach too.”

“Is something worrying you?”

Agnes, noticing Henrietta's tired face, asked before leaving the room.

"Yes - the letter that came from Louise."

"It's alright – she safely rescued that Gallian princess."

"That's not it. She wrote that she would respectfully accept any punishment I deem necessary. Does that child not understand how worried she makes me?"

"Are you not going to punish her?"

Henrietta became silent.

"Was there an official protest from Gallia?"

Henrietta shook her head.

"Then the only crimes would be breaking out of the prison and crossing a border without permission. No, Gallia has been acting seditious lately, so having a former royal family member at hand would not be politically bad at all. The benefits compensate for the losses, so how about settling with giving no rewards or punishments?"

"You are kind, Commander."

"Your Majesty, why do you insist on passing the judgment at La Vallière's house?

"I wanted to publicly show that even though she is my friend, justice will be delivered fairly."

Agnes watched Henrietta with gentle eyes.

"You are overdoing it, Your Majesty. The court will be witnessed by the noble family members."

"And for that reason, I need to show firm resolve."

Henrietta, in a gesture of a thoughtful, fastidious girl, bit her lip. Agnes smoothly drew her sword.

“I am Your Majesty’s sword. Just order me and I will serve you with this sword. Yet, I am a sword and a shield. Whenever there is danger, I will shield Your Majesty with my body. However, how many of those court nobles are Your Majesty’s swords and shields? Reliable in need, with the ethics and reason of a simple servicewoman like me, who would be completely devoted to Your Majesty. Who, with a heart of steel, would not doubt you no matter what. If you have such friends – value them dearly, Your Majesty.”

Hearing Agnes’s words, Henrietta bit her lip. Her restless fingers started fiddling with her skirt.

“But I agree with Your Majesty, remission without discipline is not acceptable. In this case, I will trust Your Majesty’s judgment. Then how about repaying for that little unpaid work from before?”

Henrietta shifted uneasily.

“We need everyone’s consent.”

“And how many these 'everyone' could equal them in their noble deed?”

Henrietta became silent.

“It is everyone's answer.”

Agnes bowed and went out of the working room to prepare the queen’s carriage. Left alone, Henrietta watched the letter from Louise.

Then she made a face that was about to cry.

“Everyone is just so selfish! People's hearts are a mystery! Not just me, father, the whole family!”

After spewing out all those angry words, Henrietta pressed the letter against her heart. Besides, there was something she needed to talk with Louise’s family about. It was really saddening.

However, the first thing she needed to do was express her gratitude for her friends' safety, Henrietta thought.

“I am glad you are alright. Thank you, Founder Brimir, for bringing my friends back, safe and sound.”

After leaving the workroom, Agnes went to the stable to prepare the horses. After that, she went towards the musketeers’ building nearby, and after calling the vice-commander of the troops, gave her the instructions on what to do during her absence. It didn’t take long to finish the preparations. And now, riding a horse, she passed under the castle gates.

There, waiting for Agnes, stood a man whose face was hidden by a deep hood.

Seeing the man, Agnes stopped her horse next to him.

“We’ll be heading to the La Vallière Estate. You must come as well.”

“You did not bring me here to throw me in prison?”

The man’s hood moved. Colbert’s honest face appeared from there.

“There was no prison escape with your help.”

“What?”

“We can’t let it be publicly known that someone can escape from the prison with the help of just two people.”

Agnes had a displeased look on her face. Colbert sheepishly bowed.

“But why take me to La Vallière’s estate?”

“You don’t want to meet your pupils?”

Hearing those words, Colbert’s face lit up.

“Ah! Then they must have succeeded! I am so glad! Ahaha, I am really glad!”

Agnes called a subordinate musketeer to prepare Colbert's horse. After that, with the rest of the musketeers, they waited for the queen’s carriage in front of castle

gates.

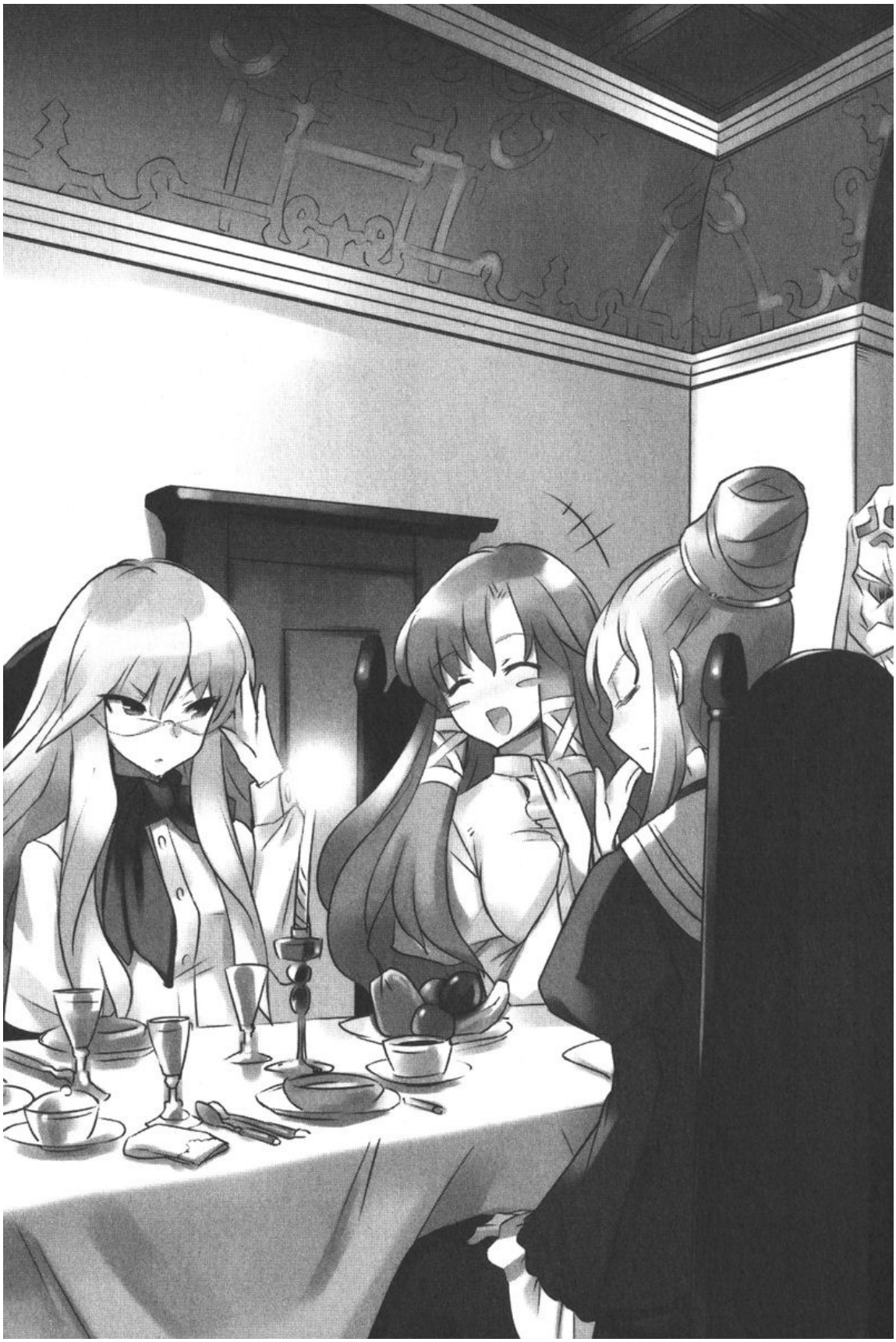
In the La Vallière castle, powerful family members gathered and waited impatiently. A gorgeous lunch was served on the big table in the dining room; however, no one tried to touch the dishes.

Duke of La Vallière was sitting at the end of the table, his hard gray eyes were shining.

Pon! his fist hit the table. Even though the sound was loud, no one, including servants, moved a muscle. It was not unusual for the duke to express his anger this openly.

“Louise, that chit, does she have an idea how worried she makes us?!”

“It is as father says. Without the family’s consent, she takes part in a war, crosses the national borders without permission, and sneaks into Gallia! It could turn into another war!”



Eléonore’s sharp eyes were blazing behind her glasses when she agreed with her father’s words. She gathered the information that leaked out of Tristania’s academy.

Cattleya was silently listening to her father and elder sister's words, before her Louise-like pink hair started to shake as she began pleasantly laughing.

“Isn’t it great? Helping out a classmate from Gallia – how heroic. I’m proud of her.”

Eléonore gave Cattleya a piercing glare.

“This is not the time for laughs. Weren’t you the one helping out that child last time? Weren’t you the one who melted the golden chain of the drawbridge not so long ago?”

“Hmm, I can’t remember such thing.”

Cattleya continued to laugh softly.

“Really? But this time this child broke the country's laws. Isn’t Her Majesty coming here for this – to give her direct judgment? It could even mean the destruction of the whole family!”

“You are exaggerating.”

Cattleya said while laughing.

“I am not exaggerating. As it is, because in the previous cases we did not send troops to the war, the government is not likely to be merciful.”

It was so. The La Vallière duke house hadn’t sent even a single soldier during the recent Albion campaign. As a result, an enormous military service exemption tax was imposed. Though the La Vallière duke house obediently paid it, the nobles who went to the war criticized the duke as a "disloyal."

“This is not a revolt against the royal family. Besides, isn’t Louise her majesty’s friend? I don’t think there will be a severe punishment given.”

“She would not remember such an old thing. Besides, Louise returns from the

Von Zerbst estate, right? The Ancestors would grieve hearing such a thing.”

Then the sisters both fell silent as their mother, Duchess of La Vallière, opened her mouth.

“Before receiving judgment from Her Majesty, this family has its own punishment to deal.”

With these words, the air in the dining room froze. The face of Duke of La Vallière paled.

“P-Punishment to deal?”

“As stated, I will deal it myself.”

The servants, who stood silently behind them, started to tremble.

Eléonore had an unusually strained smile on her lips.

“I-It’s nothing mother should be concerned with… Right, Cattleya?”

Cattleya's voice was nervous for a moment.

“I-I think so too.”

Kohn coughed Duke of La Vallière.

“Umm, Karin. It’s like the daughters say. Nothing to bother with… Right Jerome?”

The duke requested an agreement from the butler.

“Ah, I have to go. I just remembered I have things to do.”

The old butler hastily retreated. As if by a signal, all servants left the dining room together.

Simultaneously, with the stomping sounds of the closing door, the duchess stood up. Her expression didn’t change. However, something strong rose swaying in slow motion from her body.

"It‘s my responsibility for my daughter's carelessness, thus I myself will educate her. Isn't that so?"

Duke of La Vallière, with trembling fingers began to fiddle with his mustache. He recalled the old times. Youth, beauty, and the severe past of his wife…

“It is so! A-Asking for a strict lecture! Give me a second…”

These words were muted by a strong roaring sound. Dust fluttered down the table. Looking up, one could see the whole wall vanish completely, under the indescribably powerful spell.

The duchess who was holding the wand, shook her head and said.

“It's too hard to reduce the power of my magic even further, but it should work out fine...”

“K-Karin! Therefore Louise…”

The duchess glared at her husband's face.

“She is your and my daughter! It has to look strict! A long time from now, when you're looking back, you’ll see her being raised up wrong because of your selfish whim!”

At the shout of his wife, the duke instinctively ducked his head.

“S-Sorry!”

“Our family is important, our daughter is important as well; I don’t want to pass on either. That’s why the "Heavy Wind" will give the punishment to our daughter. Her Majesty will see.”

“Hey, Louise. Tell me what’s wrong?”

Saito was watching Louse with concern. Since the carriage entered La Vallière's territory, Louise had been trembling for a while. It was at the same time intense

and restless.

Sitting on the opposite seat, Guiche, Malicorne, and Montmorency mysteriously watched Louise too.

“Do you have a fever? Are you cold?” Kirche, who was sitting next to Saito, placed a hand on surprisingly cold fingers and asked in a shocked voice.

Tabitha was sitting next to them. Her mother was left in Kirche's residence rather than taking her to Tristain. Though Kirche recommended for her to remain in residence with her mother, Tabitha was stubborn. However, as it was safe to let Tabitha's mother stay in Kirche's residence, everyone agreed to let Tabitha follow them. Also, Tabitha's mother's mind had not fully recovered from her sickness. She was now just less afraid of seeing Tabitha as compared to before.

“Hey Tabitha, don’t you agree that Louise is acting strange?”

Ignoring what was said, Tabitha cast a glance at Louise. Unusually, a book was not with her. She strongly grasped the long cane she found in Baron Misscoeur's room while escaping the Alhambra castle and looked closer at her.

Tabitha could see Louise’s shoulders shivering.

“Frightened.”

She said.

“When invading the Alhambra castle, she was not scared. But now, returning to her parents and family, she is? Strange child.”

Saito recalled Louise's parents. Louise’s father who wore hard armor, the impenetrable Duke of La Vallière…

Louise’s eldest sister, Eléonore, who took Louise’s personality even further to an extreme…

Can one be blamed to be scared of such a family?

“But, well, I guess it’s reason enough for not eating. The last time, you ran away without getting a permission to take part in the war.”

“Circumstances are different.”

Louise said in a shaky voice.

“Circumstances?”

“Taking part in a war without permission was not breaking the 'rules'”

Saito lightly tapped Louise’s shoulder.

“If it is not a rule, then they're like Princess-sama; angry on you like a monarchic government prefecture for violating the law? Then I guess your father and elder sister are angry too. Still, it can’t be as bad as beheading…”

Saito remembered Louise’s father’s angry face and shivered.

“On the contrary, in my family, if one violates the regulations, being hated is as bad as being dead.”

Louise hugged herself with both hands and started trembling heavily.

“W-What?! You are scared this much?! Who is it? Is it the father? Or that young woman?”

“M-M-M-M...”

“M-?”

“Mother.”

Saito tried to revive what little glimpse he had on Louise’s mother. Though she had a strong, high-handed aura around her, she was sitting quietly. It certainly didn’t look like a person who could make others shiver in fear.”

“She’ll spank you?”

Hearing that, Louise clutched her stomach as if in pain.

“Louise! Louise! What is it?”

“Eeeh, Louise, is your mother that scary?”

Malicorne said in a growing senile voice.

In a heavy voice, as if cursing, Louise spit out.

“Do you… know the former commander of the Manticore Corps?”

“Who would not know about such celebrity! Karin the ‘Heavy Wind’ was it? It is said that the lower half of her face was always covered with an iron mask… She served the kingdom since the start as a wind user. They called this magic a ‘heavy wind,’ but ‘raging storm’ would have been a more appropriate name for it.”

Guiche, after Malicorne's words, also recalled few things.

“When Eustace raised a revolt, wasn’t it the ‘Heavy Wind’ who suppressed it single-handedly? Father told me, that when he was young, he led his troops to take over the Cardin Bridge, but it was already taken over by Karin the Heavy Wind. And that it has been said that the Heavy Wind used to work alone.”

Soon, they began telling one after another, old hero stories.

“When Germanian troops were skirmishing at the border, it is said that once the rumors spread that 'the Wind' was at the front-line, enemies ran away.”

“However, there are rumors that she was a very beautiful person. According to the rumor, she was a beauty in male attire…”

“Indeed. But one has to wonder, does such a strong woman disguised as a man… Really exist?”

Guiche’s face turned blue once he heard Montmorency's words.

“C-Could it be that Karin the Heavy Wind is…”

Louise said in a strained voice.

“My mother.”

Everyone in the carriage looked at each other, and then nervously asked Louise.

“Lying?”

“I am not. D-Do you know the motto of Manticore unit of that time?”

All the party members shook their heads. As one might expect, no one knew the motto of the corps.

“Rule of steel. My mother hated lack of discipline the most.”

Chapter Three: Karin the Heavy Wind

It was the morning of the second day since leaving Tristain when the Queen's carriage crossed the drawbridge of the La Vallière residence. Since it was a low-profile visit, other than Agnes and Colbert, there were only five musketeers guarding the wagon.

As the party passed the bridge and gates, the servants who gathered there rejoiced. The flagpole in the front yard had the Lilies emblem, the arms of the Tristanian royal family, on it. A small courtesy for the incognito queen.

When Agnes got off the horse, she opened the door of the carriage.

The armor of a magic knight was seen in the center of the stairs that continued to the castle. Agnes squinted at it.

“What’s the matter, commander?”

Then Henrietta saw the knight who stood at the center of the stairs, and gasped in surprise.

“That’s the armor of the Manticore Corps.”

Indeed, the armor had the big black mantel with the Manticore Corps' emblem sewn on it.

“But the Manticore Corps works at the castle now. Besides, that shuttlecock decoration… That hat belongs to a commander.”

“But the body is too thin to be De Cesaire.”

“Perhaps it’s not his to begin with.”

The knight slowly went down stairs. Musketeers, surrounding the Queen, watched the figure intensely with their hands on their guns.

Then Agnes took one step forth and blocked the knight’s path. The lower half of his face, under the knight's hat decorated with shuttlecock, was covered with an iron mask. Feeling intense pressure for the moment, Agnes grasped the handle of her sword.

“Are you a friend of Duke of La Valliere? To go out to meet Her Majesty like this - it’s too much even for a prank. Introduce yourself.”

However, the knight ignored Agnes's words, and knelt down on one knee in respect.

“It's been a long time, Your Majesty. However, you will surely not remember me, because it has been a good 30 years since the last time I served the castle.”

“Umm…”

Henrietta, with an open-jaw, looked at the knight. Indeed, though the mantle's colors faded a lot over the years, it was still nicely kept - neither stain nor tear could be found.

“I am Karin, the former commander of the Manticore corps. However, even though I introduced myself with a different name back then, my loyalty for the royal family has not changed.”

Henrietta had heard about the former commander of Manticore Corps, so her face turned pale.

“Then, you are Karin the Heavy Wind?!”

“Yes, I am honored that you know the name.”

“Of course I know – you are infamous! Agnes, this is Karin the Heavy Wind, the legendary magic knight commander! I grew up hearing about her heroic adventures!”

Henrietta had the face of a starry-eyed little girl as she took Karin’s hand.

“I had yearned to meet you so much since childhood! Fire dragon extermination! Rescue of a city attacked by orcs… Gorgeous use of weapons! Presence massive as a mountain! Ages when nobles were still noble, and true knights. A lot of knights respect you and try to be just like you!”

“It’s embarrassing.”

“What would you say?! I-I know all your adventures by memory! You are a woman, right? After you retired, though, I heard that you disappeared like the wind, but you were with La Vallières. What are you doing now?”

Karin removed her mask abruptly. Seeing her face, Henrietta’s eyes almost popped from their sockets.

“Duchess! You are the Duchess!”

Agnes was surprised too.

“Then, this…”

“In other words, I am the Duchess of La Vallière – the mother of Louise…”

“I took the opportunity to marry and took off my armor. But it is a long story since that time, so please pardon me.”

“I understand, but why…”

Henrietta wanted to ask why she now wore the armor that she previously took off.

Karin stood up straight.

“For today, I am not the Duchess Karin. I am Karin, the former commander of the Manticore Corps, who respects the rule of steel. And I will punish that law breaking daughter of mine. This will be the proof of my loyalty to Your Majesty and family.”

“Punishment?! Heavy Wind’s punishment on Louise?!”

Henrietta watched Karin in deep shock, shaking her head. Her face turned pale. She had gone there with the intention to punish Louise, so her feelings withered for a moment. But this person would give a much more severe punishment than she herself intended. Should the punishment be dealt, Louise would die for sure!

“You should not be violent! I came here to deal with Louise’s punishment myself. Because I am young, at first I was resented. However, I thought about it a lot. Though Louise passed national borders certainly without my permission… I am also worried about it as a friend too. Just a strong reprimand will do, I do not intend to give a violent penalty.”

“Your Majesty, your words are kind, and you feel regretful. However, Your Majesty's royal prerogative is of the sacred non-aggression given by the Founder. Thus, you have to protect the laws of the country promulgated in that name, too.”

Karin quickly raised her right hand. From the shade of the castle, a huge, black shadow flew. A strong dust storm rose as it touched the ground.

It was an old and huge mythical beast, the Manticore.

“If the laws of the country that should be respected are neglected, Your Majesty should keep her royal principles. But because the law-breaker is my own daughter, I cannot forgive it all the more.”

Karin effortlessly flew up fifty meters and straddled the manticore.

“K-Karin-dono!”

The Manticore flapped its huge wings. And, with amazing speed, the mythical beast flew up to the sky with its master.

La Vallière's castle was closer to the border of Germania than the capital. After passing the nation's borders at three o'clock, they could already see the high steeples of the castle.

“H-Hey Louise… Your mother is really the Heavy Wind of the Manticore

Corps?”

Saito opened his mouth, breaking the heavy silence. However, Louise did not say a thing. Those days, Louise passed her time trembling and staring at the ceiling.

“As good as thirty years passed, maybe she's changed? Nah? It is not unreasonable that the scary knight of the past mellowed out over the years. Even if you say punishment, I think you will just be grounded, at most.”

“…You don’t understand.”

Louise said in the voice of someone at her own execution.

“Violence is part of youth, no human can keep it steady forever,”

Montmorency rationalized.

“…You just don’t understand.”

“Don't worry so much.”

“…Saying so plainly, my mother. That person…”

After those words, everyone in the wagon felt nervous. It became impossible for Saito to bear the tension, and he laughed aloud. Mere bravado.

“Ahahaha! Worrying this much!”

“Really! Even if she was the legendary Heavy Wind, she may just be a Duchess now! Refined by society, she may have completely forgotten the dust and dirt of the battlefield!”

At that time, Tabitha pointed to the window,

“A manticore-riding knight.”

Louise suddenly sprung to her feet, and as if overtaken by panic, broke the window of the carriage and flew outside.

Gooooooooooooooo! A huge tornado appeared and followed Louise’s

tracks.

“W-What’s that?!”

The moment Saito was dumb-founded… the tornado enlarged and hit the entire carriage with enormous strength. The violent power blew off the harness that tied horses to the wagon and sucked it and the horses in, lifting them up into the sky.

“What’s thaaaaaaaaaaaaat!” Saito shouted.

“Giyaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!” Guiche screamed.

“Uwaaaaaaaaaaa!” Malicorne bellowed.

“Nooooooooooooooooooo!” Montmorency cried.

“I give uuuup…” Kirche complained.

“…” Tabitha was silent.

It was as if a huge hand made of wind grabbed the carriage and lifted it up. Six people in the wagon were shaken like a cocktail in a shaker.

“Aii! Dee! Giyaaa!”

The six screaming people were hitting walls, seats, and each other. Then the tornado stopped abruptly and the wagon fell to the ground.

“Falling! Falling! Falling!”

Is this how it feels to be in a lift that had its cable cut? Saito thought dumbly as the carriage casually floated in the air.

The knight had placed the “Levitation” spell on them.

Though the wagon slowly landed, the party was lying scattered and worn out inside the carriage.

Saito, thinking desperately, crawled out of the wagon. Louise was lying shaking on the ground.

“Lou-i-se!”

Though he tried to shout and run up to her, he could not move well.

Riding atop a huge manticore, the knight wearing a black mantle appeared. That must have been Louise’s mama. However, she was frightening. Standing there, it looked like “stern” was the character of this knight and that “fear” was deeply emblazed in this armored doll-like figure.

Then she stopped at the fallen Louise and called out her daughter.

“Get up, Louise.”

Louise raised herself.

“Mother-sama…”

She was shaking violently as if suffering from a strong cold. Like a small dog threatened by a big German shepherd. Though Louise could be scary when she was angry as well, this had a completely different feeling to it – it was like comparing a bear to a rat.

“You. Report what you have broken to your mother.”

“That… b-border without permission, umm…”

“I cannot hear you.”

“B-Border crossing without permission.”

The tornado flew. It caught Louise and threw her two hundred meters up into the sky, and once she started falling down, the wind started spinning her around like a tiny fallen leaf.

“Is this what your mother taught you?”

Her pink hair was disheveled and her skirt was blown off somewhere, revealing her underwear in their full glory, but it was not the place for Louise to feel shy about it.

“I-I’m sorry for breaking the laws of the country! But there were extenuating

circumstances!”

The knight extended the wand.

“Your little good deeds do not matter much in this respect. Whatever the circumstances were, the law has been broken. As a result, it can make a lot more people unhappy.”

The storm blew hard against Louise.

Not able to look at this anymore, Saito ran up to stand in front of Louise.

“P-Please stop!”

“And you are?”

Wearing black mantle, her lower half of the face hidden behind the mask, Karin asked Saito.

“Well… umm, Louise’s familiar.”

“Aah!”

Karin nodded.

“You were the boy accompanying Louise the other day. So, you were a familiar.”

Saito then knelt on the ground and took Louise in his arms, trying to wake her up.

“Hey! Are you alright? Are you alive?”

“Fhn… mou, no… fhn”

Louise’s eyes were still spinning and she looked out of shape. It could hardly be otherwise. It was as if she had been thrown into a huge washing machine– washed, rinsed, dried and blown. Even the prettiest girl in the country would look a mess after such ride.

Karin set up the wand again.

“W-Wait! Can’t you stop for now! Louise is already worn-out!”

Seeing Saito acting like this, Guiche called out.

“Stop it, Saito. It’s a problem between family members. Are you tired of living?”

Karin quietly watched Saito.

“A familiar is their master’s shield. For that reason, the shield needs to be blown off. No hard feelings I hope?”

A huge tornado appeared behind Karin. It was almost on the same size as the one that blew the wagon. Saito grasped Derflinger. The runes on his left hand started to shine.

“Hey Derf.”

“What?”

“Is it bad?”

Saito pointed at the huge tornado.

“It is bad. It isn’t just a wild tornado. The layer of the vacuum narrows around it and will cut deeply if touched. Frightening square spellcraft…”

There was no time to hear the explanation.

It leaped right at him and Saito, aiming the sword forward, received it at once.

“Stop! Run away!”

Though Derflinger shouted, there was no time. Long, deep cuts, as if done by innumerable sharp razors, appeared all over Saito’s body.

“H-Huuuuuuuuurts!”

“Told you so! This fellow is a ‘Cutter Tornado!’ You will be cut to pieces before I can absorb it!”

Though Saito was soaking with blood, he did not move an inch.

Confused and paralyzed with fear, Louise’s eyes caught the sight of the wounded Saito. In an instant, her mind, dyed with the pure white of fear a few moments before, now blazed with anger like a raging fire.

Normally, Louise would never rebel against her mother. She grew up disciplined like that.

Without thinking, Louise lifted her wand and recited the "Void" spell.

Once the sounds of spell chanting reached Karin’s ears, she slightly puckered up her brows. She never heard of such spell. It was not fire. Not water. Nor wind. It wasn’t even an earth spell.

Louise rejected the wand and lowered it. The rampaging "Cutter Tornado," that

engulfed Saito, started to shine.

Not used to such light, Karin flinched for a split second.

What on earth was that spell that her daughter cast?

Though the preparation time was short, it was still strong enough to cancel her own spell.

Louise’s "Dispel Magic" made her mother’s "Cutter Tornado" vanish…

When Karen finally recovered from the shock and started to utter an incantation again, something pressed against her back.

“Please stop it! That’s enough! Please stop!”

It was Henrietta, who rode by the horse all the way from La Vallière castle. Agnes was right behind her.

“I won’t tolerate any more fights in front of me! Moreover, you are parent and child! If you want to continue, you’ll have to turn your wand against me!”

Following the queen’s words, Karin put down the wand. Louise and Saito, who had already reached the limit of their physical strength and energy, both crumbled to the ground.

Henrietta ran up to the fallen Saito.

“You are badly injured!”

Panicking, she started to recite a water magic spell. Saito's injuries were healed by the queen’s "Healing." He lifted up his bloody face.

“Princess-sama…”

“Don’t talk! You are badly hurt!”

Henrietta recited another water magic in succession.

“Louise…”

Henrietta's cheek trembled.

“It’s alright – she is safe. Her friend is looking after her.”

It was Montmorency who left the wagon and now was tending Louise.

“I see…” muttered Saito and fainted.

Next to the tending Henrietta, Karin knelt down

“Your Majesty, I punished my sinful daughter. Hope you will show her a greater punishment than mine.”

Henrietta let out a long sigh.

“Mo! What is that! You! When child and parent point their wands at each other – it makes the Founder Brimir grieve! Didn’t I say that I did not intend to give any punishment since the very beginning!”

“Solving everything with wands - is the way of old nobles.”

“Unnecessarily bloodshed is what I hate the most! You there! Quick, carry these two injured people to the residence!”

Following Henrietta's orders, Guiche and others put "Levitation" on Louise and Saito and started to carry them to the castle.

Chapter Four: The Vallière Family

“Now then, did you just say ‘Void?’”

That night... the queen, enclosed in the living room of the La Vallière house, confessed a secret.

Duke of La Vallière was sitting wordlessly in front of the fireplace, watching the flame burn. Next to the father, the two elder sisters were listening carefully with a serious looks on their faces.

Karin Desiree was there too, she had changed her mantle back to her usual duchess dress. The sharp eyes of that fearsome knight of Heavy Wind also disappeared somewhere. An indescribably quick change.

Louise and Saito’s friends – Guiche, Kirche and others, due to Henrietta’s request, were taking a rest in the room nearby.

Saito and Louise themselves were sitting together on the sofa, nervously fiddling their fingers. Because Saito was severely injured by Karin’s wind magic, parts of his body were covered in bandages. Even Henrietta’s water spells could not cure him completely.

Henrietta, who sat in the top seat, gave a strong nod.

“That’s right. Louise’s awoken element... is the legendary element of ‘Void.’”

Duke of La Vallière fiddled with his mustache for a while, then stood up slowly and approached his daughter.

Then he gently patted Louise's head.

“Your fairy tale-esque story is hard to believe. The Void element disappeared from history long time ago. And only religious theology still asserted that ‘it

existed...’”

Karin’s sharp eyes shone as she made a small cough.

“I believe it.”

“Karin.”

“My spell was canceled by Louise’s spell today... It started to shine even though I could not see any explosion. Was that the ‘Void,’ Louise?”

Louise nodded.

“It is so, Mother.”

“Hmm...”

Duke of La Vallière fell silent. Eléonore fell down on the floor.

“Void... You – void? It’s impossible to believe...”

Cattleya stood up and began to look after her elder sister.

Henrietta continued talking.

“I myself could not believe it as well. However, it is true. ‘Void’ returned and it’s not just Louise who controls it.”

The family members felt silent again.

It felt like silence lasted for an eternity.

Finally, Duke of La Vallière broke the silence.

“I would like to hear the intentions of Her Majesty’s visit.”

Taking a deep breath, as if finally setting her mind on something, Henrietta looked straight at Duke of La Vallière.

“Please entrust Louise to me.”

“She is my daughter. Her body and mind are dedicated to you, Your Majesty.”

“There’s no need for such formality.”

Henrietta motioned to Agnes.

Then Agnes nodded and opened the big leather bag at her side and took a black mantle out. Duke of La Vallière’s eyes widened when he saw the crest shaped Lily on the purple lining.

“This is Royal family crest... young Marinanne used to wear this mantle!”

“Louise, you were already given the punishment for illegally crossing the national borders.”

“Y-Yes!”

“Wear this.”

“B-But this...”

“Yes. Wearing this, you’ll become my sister. In other words – you will be the second successor to the throne.”

“G-G-G-Gracious. Or should I say too gracious...”

“You, your power is too great. This is a huge responsibility for one’s shoulders, and the obligation to help the country this way will be remembered twice as much.”

Henrietta watched Louise with stern eyes. On wobbly legs, like a frog bitten by snake, Louise received it.

Duke of La Vallière’s mouth opened wide to this unexpected Louise’s promotion.

“Your Majesty, I wish to express my gratitude for such warm reception of my daughter. No, even the biggest gratitude, cannot compare to such warm reception. However, there is something I’d like to ask Your Majesty.”

“What is it?”

“Does Your Majesty know what to do with this legendary power that my daughter has? Indeed, ‘Void’ is a legend. It was even able to cancel Karin's magic, so that power is considerably strong. Did you use it in a battle during the recent war campaign?”

“This... I will reflect it deeply.”

“My daughter is neither a cannon ball nor a flaming arrow. If some bad things are done to my daughter, Your Majesty...”

“Then?”

“Then, alas, I will throw away the history of serving the Royal family for years, and cross wands with you.”

It was not the duke but the father sympathizing with his daughter. Seeing that, Saito’s chest began to throb.

Hearing the duke’s words as such, Agnes tried to pull out her sword. Henrietta stopped her.

“Then, I myself, have a question for the duke. For you as an old-time noble and the protector of this country’s pride and dignity.”

“Yes?”

“Why does war happen? We who are wise, who reign over other lord’s creations, who are more outstanding than mythical beasts and demi-humans - for what do the same family members fight against each other?”

“...”

“On countless occasions wars have occurred. With our own eyes we see people important to us become injured or die. I too, caused a war blinded by revenge. The result – not only those important to my people, but many other people died... parents, children, brothers and friends were lost. I myself am carrying the guilt that can never be taken off my shoulders.”

“...you are not responsible for that war, Your Majesty.”

“No, under my name, everyone fought, got injured, died. If I myself don’t shoulder it, who will?”

Henrietta deeply lowered her head.

“I want to use Louise's power... for something right. But how can I, when I can’t even understand my current self yet? However, I do not intend to use it to fight. Please believe that, Duke.”

“I fear, Your Majesty, that even if there is no intention to use it to fight, sooner or later a time will come when it will be necessary to use it anyway. No, such strong power attracts people.”

“It is as the duke says. Now, other countries are active behind the scenes too. People who want to get such great power and extend their wicked claws towards us also exist. I'm doing this to protect Louise from the people who want to place her in their paws and control her.”

“It’s exactly why I feel uneasy. There are enemies who want a strong power. What if it is only Your Majesty’s words? Now you say you are determined, but who can guarantee it won’t change sometime? Is there something with which Your Majesty's determination can be proven?”

Henrietta lowered her eyes, feeling conflicted, and after contemplating that there was no other way, she said resignedly,

“There is none. I will be honest, even I do not fully believe in myself. Therefore, there is no way to prove it.”

After that, Henrietta smiled. It was not a careworn, but a sincere smile that touched every person who saw it.

“Therefore I... would not want a friend nearside whom I cannot completely trust. I want a true friend who could point out my mistakes. A friend who, when seeing me straying from the path of virtue, would not hesitate to turn her wand against me...”

The old duke watched Henrietta. For a while, after looking deep into her eyes, he returned the glance back to Louise.

“Didn’t you tell your father before, that ‘the awoken element is fire?’ Was that a lie?”

Louise nodded in shame.

“It was something like that, father.”

“It is alright Louise. But it should be the first and the last time you tell your father lies.”

Then, the duke turned back to Henrietta,

“I am an old aristocrat. An old-fashioned elderly person. Things were simple, to a degree, when I was young. Loyal with honor and pride, defending only that, and there was no worry to be scorned by anyone. However... the times are different now. Since the power of the legend revived - old justice, old sense of values... they all might lose their meaning.”

The duke looked at Henrietta, like at his daughter.

“Your Majesty said before, that you ‘cannot believe in yourself.’ Such a doubting mind... is the best guide to enter the brighter future.”

“Father-sama.”

Louise ran up and clung to her father.

“You are growing Louise. My Louise. This father thought you would stay the same forever. However, you already started your own life.”

The father gently patted his daughter's head.

“Just father’s garrulity. Devotion is to point out mistakes. And… courage is to admit them. True courage. Louise, do not forget. My little Louise.”

“...Father.”

“Whenever you are in trouble, always return here. Because here is your home.”

The duke kissed Louise’s forehead and quietly pushed her away. Then he deeply bowed to Henrietta.

“Take care of this inexperienced daughter of mine. I pray for the Founder’s divine protection for the road you walk.”

For a while silence followed the words... then Duchess Karin clapped hands.

“Karin.”

“The long story seems to have ended. Even if it’s late, let’s prepare for dinner. Though it's a poor way to entertain Your Majesty, who came all the way here, please attend. Louise, call your friends and come; Cattleya, Eléonore, please continue your favors as host.”

Like a gracious soldier from the past, Karin briskly left the room.

Following her, the two elder sisters left. Then Louise went to call Guiche and others...

When Saito also tried to go, he was stopped by Henrietta.

“...Princess.”

Though Henrietta’s face clouded for a moment, she still was able to force a smile.

“I apologize.”

Saito’s cheeks dyed red and he looked down.

“No… there is no reason to. I did a selfish thing to begin with.”

“Courageous gentlemen are like wild falcons and stallions. They say ‘I am going,’ and they go without turning back.”

Henrietta received a mantle from Agnes and handed it to Saito. The Chevalier's crest was sewn up on it – it was a knight‘s mantle.

“Take it back. What the queen gave once - cannot be returned.”

“But...”

Saito hesitated.

“This is not the chain that binds you. These are the wings for a falcon. It won’t hurt you to wear it.”

Henrietta said. Saito nodded and received the mantle.

Henrietta watched with tenderly smiling eyes as Saito put the mantle on.

The look in her eyes surprised Saito for a moment.

The fever in her eyes that she used to show for Saito recently, was now gone.

Instead, it was a pair of lonely... very lonely but determined eyes, that understood their resolution.

Henrietta drew her mouth to Saito's ear and silently whispered.

“Calm down. It’s not the face you should show to the queen.”

“Eh?”

Abruptly, Henrietta extended her left hand. He wouldn’t make the same mistake this time. Saito, feeling slightly nervous, gently took the offered hand and pulled it to his lips.

Then Henrietta gave a happy smile and left the room.

Like a shadow, Agnes followed her.

The meaning behind Henrietta’s words left hanging. However he could not understand it well somehow. No, it was not love. Something different.

Something different.

As I thought, it was just her momentarily loneliness. That’s why she depended on me this much. That’s ok. But those words just now, what meaning did they carry?

Though she was little lonely, Henrietta was still prideful.

When Saito tried to leave as well, he was called to stop by Duke of La Vallière who stayed last.

“Wait.”

Saito trembled. A cold shiver went down his spine. Somehow he had a bad feeling about this.

In his mind he revived the recent event in the courtyard.

The Duke saw him pushing Louise down in the boat, and ordered to behead him. Maybe he, as Louise’s papa, a person with high position, didn’t remember a commoner's face?

However, circumstances are circumstances. Somehow he could guess that he made an indelible impression back then. Maybe at least, Louise’s mama, Karin was not there long enough to remember?

“Incidentally, I have not heard your name.”

“S-Saito. I am Saito Chevalier de Hiraga.”

Saito added the title to his name. Maybe he would not be treated with suspicion this way.

“It’s our first meeting.”

After Duke of La Vallière's words, Saito could only feel a great relief inside.

I'm so glad. I won‘t be necessarily killed. F-Founder Brimir-sama, thank you... Saito dedicated his deepest gratitude to the founder in whom he did not believe.

“Yes. It’s our first meeting after you became Chevalier.”

In a single moment, Saito was thrown from heaven down to the depths of hell. Duke of La Vallière, placed a hand on Saito's shoulder.

“Calm down. I cannot order the beheading of a knight of Her Majesty's Imperial Guards.”

“T-Thank you very much!”

“However, how about a little practice before the dinner?”

The duke grasped Saito's shoulder with a strength that a man of his age could not posses.

“Ouch! Aiiiiiiii!”

“So that your body remembers whose daughter you are trying to wolf away.”

Duke dragged Saito away.

Happy chatter about the day's events filled the dining room that evening. Reunion was accomplished when Agnes brought Colbert. As a bonus, Henrietta did not say no, and listened to the beaming face Guiche – everyone was amusing themselves in this fuss.

However... the dinner fest ended, and even when bed-time came too, Saito did not appear.

“Do any of you know if something happened to Saito-kun?”

Colbert asked, but all members in the room shook their heads.

“I wonder where he went...” Kirche said.

While everyone inside was concerned, asking where he was, Saito was lying half-dead in the corridor.

“M-Move...”

Saito sighed, lying prostrated in the hall. He was first beaten up by Louise’s mama during the day, and during the night time he was trashed by Duke of La Vallière – so now his body was screaming.

Though Louise mama's magic was fearsome, Duke of La Vallière was truly terrifying.

The eyes full of anger even now were making Saito tremble from head to toes.

It was as if he was seeing his daughter get pushed down by Saito, and

aggressively attacked Saito. Saito could not move at all and could only bear the full brunt of the attacks single-sidedly. However, instead of saying that it was a beating, it was more appropriate to describe it as shooting. Of course, Saito was the target.

Then again, what kind of parent and child were they?

He staggered trying to stand up but fell down.

“Right now, everyone must be happily enjoying the meal...”

Saito leaned against the wall. Outside the window, he could see the pair of moons.

However... no matter how stern they looked, both Louise’s parents loved her.

Even Louise's mother did not want Louise to be hurt badly, and because of that she inflicted a cruel punishment, as if asking Henrietta - "Please forgive her."

Even Louise’s father was ready to throw away his duke title to protect Louise.

“I, of course, do not have anyone to protect me like this.”

Saito complained, looking at his wounds.

“Parents...”

Saito recalled his parents, whom he had not seen for more than a year now.

When was it, the last time when he was also protected like this. He remembered it to be when he was still in primary school. He had been assigned a path to follow to go to his school, and it was a must to follow it, so it was forbidden to use another road to return home. But one day, Saito walked along another path. That was only because Saito couldn't find the eraser he had been using all along at the bookstore he frequented. Saito's classmate found out, and told the teacher.

The teacher was extremely angry towards Saito.

But Saito's parents told him, "That's ridiculous, you're not in the wrong."

His mother, who would only say "Study well". His father, a reticent salaryman.

They were an ordinary family like everywhere else.

Before noticing, Saito was shedding tears again.

“Huh?”

Strange – he thought rubbing his eyes.

Until now, I never cried thinking about parents...

Is it because seeing Louise’s parents’ communication reminded him of the past? *However, I can’t show such crying face to Louise and others.*

All alone in a dark corridor, Saito sat, hugging his knees.

“What are you doing?”

A clear, soft voice, made Saito jump up.

In her room, Louise was brushing her hair.

Before she entered the Academy of Magic, this was the room where she spent the most time and grew up. It was a large ten square room. A big bed with canopy was standing a little away from the window.

Moreover, it had a mountain of stuffed animals packed inside. A large number of picture books and a gorgeous sculpture of a vaulting horse. She said she wanted it and bought it herself some time ago...

While living in this room, she had been dying to get out of this residence as soon as possible. A severe education from her mother, who seemed to only think of how to marry her out; a father, always associating with the neighborhood, and the only thing he seemed to be interested in was hunting.

Those two people once said she could not learn magic. A girl who cannot do magic cannot marry off properly, they said strictly - thus, every day felt like a prison.

However, her parents and this residence were not a prison, they were the castle that protected her. Though love was not visible on the outside, deep inside she was defended and treasured.

She looked at her bed.

“...has it gotten smaller?”

No, it is not so. During childhood, that bed felt very big, but now it looks small, because I grew up.

Does that furniture look a little bit nostalgic because I grew up too?

No, Louise shook her head, *I haven’t grown up at all.*

While combing her hair with the brush... Louise was losing herself in deep thought.

Everyone... is worried about me. Mother and father, Henrietta...

And yet I am constantly only doing selfish things.

Louise let out a cute sigh, looking doubtfully into the mirror.

“Hey Louise. Louise the Zero. You being a ‘legend’ cannot be the truth.”

That’s what I was told.

Louise placed her cheek against the dressing table and closed her eyes.

“What... am I going to do in the future...?”

She remembered the words that she said to Henrietta before she left to Gallia.

To persist in the “reason” I believe... I am losing, but my spirit as a noble is somewhere here.

Louise was worried.

She did not care to pass the reason she believed. It was all fine. But, what if, as a result, many people were to suffer because of it? And that number would not be

small. *Because my “Void” power is too strong. The justice that I carry out may cause a lot of injuries to many people. Such a thing is possible.*

If I were a simple user of one of the four elements, I would not need to worry this much...

“Really, what should I do...?”

Louise felt troubled.

Then Saito’s face popped into her mind. *Just when I'm worried this much, where has that fool gone to? Is he still asleep? After all, he did not come to sit at his dinner seat.* When she asked her father, who was late as well, he said that he went to sleep because he was tired and did not say anything else.

Since their trip to Gallia, they were always accompanied by others and barely had the time to be just the two of them alone. That’s why they could not talk about a lot of things the way they used to. However, as the situations continued to change bewilderingly, they always found themselves denied of such time alone.

“If you love me, why do you leave me alone?”

Louise asked.

But, in this residence, finding the room may be difficult, I guess. Is Saito still searching for the room I am in?

“...really, that idiot is indeed capable of pulling stunts like that.”

Louise pouted.

Then, someone knocked against the door.

“Who?”

In an instant, the heart in her chest started to beat fast when she thought about Saito.

“It’s me, Louise.”

“Princess-sama.”

Henrietta's voice. Panicking, Louise ran up and opened the door. There stood Henrietta, who had changed to plain clothes, and smiled.

Louise made a profound reverence.

“Is something wrong, Louise?”

“No… sorry for the big trouble we caused...”

Fuuh - Henrietta sighed.

“It’s alright Louise. Alright. Though we had a conflict, everyone is safe. Therefore, it is alright. You just followed your reason. And I followed mine.”

“...Princess-sama.”

“Friends again?”

Henrietta smiled. Without thinking, Louise hugged Henrietta.

It was impossible to move because he was hurt, and the one who appeared in front of Saito, who was crouching in the hall, was...

“C-Cattleya-san.”

It was Cattleya, with Louise-like blond-pink hair. The second from the three La Vallière daughters was a beautiful woman with a slight sex appeal. She didn’t have Louise’s sharp look, and Saito was attracted to both her looks and the atmosphere surrounding her, so when she appeared out of the blue, he was left breathless.

“Ara, ara. So, so.”

With a surprised expression on her face, Cattleya squatted down in front of Saito.

“Those are nasty injuries... Are you alright?”

Saying so, Cattleya started checking Saito’s injuries.

“Is your head bleeding?”

She asked looking closely at his head. Then Saito’s eyes landed on Cattleya’s... body part, which, compared to her younger sister Louise, was developed the most... in other words - her breasts. Because of that heavenly presence, wrapped only in a light pink blouse, Saito almost died.

“I-I’m alright!”

Saito tried to stand up in panic. However, sharp pain hit him at once.

“Tte! Ouuuuuuuuch!”

“Don’t overdo it.”

Cattleya took out her wand and began to utter an incantation.

“Come water spirits...”

The healing spell slowly cured the injuries received from Duke of La Vallière.

“T-Thank you very much!”

Flustered, Saito bowed to Cattleya. But when he stood up and tried to leave, she grabbed his arm.

“Don’t. A healing spell cannot cure you completely. You need to be treated properly.”

Cattleya gave a wonderful smile. The smile was indescribably filled with affection. Saito felt like his spirit was already healed just by seeing it.

He was very nervous when Cattleya pulled him towards her room. Saito was surprised when he was guided inside.

A flying squirrel flew right at him, aiming for his face, making Saito cry out.

“Uwaa!”

When shouting he managed to shake it off, he leaned against something big.

It was a small bear.

“D-Damn!”

He cursed trying to escape, but stumbled on something large. It was a giant turtle. Animals came near one after another, drawing closer to Saito.

“Hey, hey. He is injured, so no games.”

After Cattleya’s words, the animals, which crowded around Saito, parted slowly.

It was as if the room was a little zoo. Saito recalled that time in the carriage too. Cattleya definitely loved animals.

“C-Cool!”

When he voiced out his impression, Cattleya laughed joyfully.

“Were you surprised?”

“No…”

Cattleya started searching through the drawers, and after some rustling, pulled out some bandages and medicine from inside and began to cure Saito's injuries. Cattleya said from the bottom of her heart.

“My mother and then my father were your opponents. That’s why your body... I am really sorry. They are not bad people. They are just sometimes stubborn...”

“They are Louise’s parents. So I don’t mind.”

When hearing him saying so, Cattleya laughed. And fell into a violent coughing fit.

“A-Are you alright?”

“I am. It’s just that I haven’t used magic for a long time, so my body is not

accustomed.”

“Eh?”

Seeing Saito’s surprised face, Cattleya shook her head.

“Ah, sorry, sorry. Never mind that. It’s nothing really.”

“R-Really?”

“Yep. I don’t usually use magic.”

Somehow, her words were filled with kindness. Without thinking, Saito started to open up.

“Nee, nee, can you tell me stories?”

Though she was older, Cattleya seemed to talk like an innocent girl. Without hesitation, she openly gazed at Saito’s face.

“A-About what?”

“Since you left, various serious things must have happened. It must have been very dangerous in Albion. I was very worried, about you and Louise.”

So Saito told Cattleya about events that followed after they came to this residence to get the permission to participate in the war. The war. How he went missing. When she heard about him charging against 70,000 soldiers, Cattleya’s eyes grew wide.

“So...you faced grave danger instead of Louise.”

“It isn’t that! I just took her place, because someone had to...”

“You are great. You did such a great feat without swaggering at all.”

Being praised by Cattleya this much, Saito felt extremely awkward.

“No that, this, that...”

“Really amazing. Louise must be happy. You are a real knight.”

Cattleya praised Saito without any ulterior motive. Being praised like this by an older woman... somehow reminded Saito of his mother.

Of course, Cattleya and his mother did not look even the slightest bit similar. But... this honest compliment was no different from his mother’s. He was not praised all that much. But he carried those praises in his memory forever.

Accidentally getting a good mark on a test...

Helping to clean the dishes...

And all those other times when his mother complimented him a lot...

“What’s wrong?”

Anxiously, Cattleya looked into Saito’s face. Unbeknownst to himself, Saito started to cry.

“S-Sorry! It’s nothing!”

“Though it is nothing, you are still crying. What’s the matter? Go ahead and talk to me.”

“No, really... really it’s nothing.”

No way could he say that he was moved to tears because he remembered his mother. She would think he is a wimp.

“Sorry. I just recalled something.”

Cattleya made a sorrowful face and gently hugged Saito’s head. Her faint perfume scent mixed with gentle kindness, made Saito close his eyes.

Being held close against Cattleya’s warm chest, settled his mind down. At the same time, he felt something very nostalgic.

“...why, why did I recall it now? Since I came over here, I did not remember that often. So weird.”

Hearing his absent-minded voice, Cattleya gently asked.

“Mother?”

“Yeah.”

Cattleya did not ask anything else. She just made a slightly lonely face and coughed out “Sorry.”

Though Saito did not understand the reason why Cattleya apologized... he did not think of it any further. He just kept his eyes closed, hugged against Cattleya’s rich chest... as if cradled by a deep sea... his heart calmed.

The conversation Henrietta and Louise shared was similar to old times.

Just like during childhood the two giggled and spoke of various things.

“With the coming of summer, I often spent my time in here.”

Eyes reminiscing of the old days, Henrietta said.

“That’s so, isn’t it.”

Louise suddenly felt the need to consult with Henrietta.

“Princess, there is one thing I would like to consult you about.”

“What is it?”

Louise asked Henrietta what was worrying her.

“If I followed my heart forward, and there was a possibility of hurting someone else if I did so, what should I do?”

Henrietta quietly listened to what Louise was saying. Her expression slightly turned solemn. She nodded towards Louise.

“I'm the queen, aren't I?”

“It is as you speak.”

“Well, even though it was not my decision, but now I'm wearing the crown. I may be young, but I've learnt some politics. However, there are still some things that I do not understand. Why does this world, never stop having wars?”

“...”

“But one can decrease the loss a little. You know what I am saying? I can’t endure seeing my important people getting hurt. It is not just me. Everyone feels the same. Therefore, I try to decrease the missions where people would lose important people or get wounded because of me. This is my job as a queen. Fights and war will never disappear, but they should be reduced.”

Louise slightly nodded.

“I want to help princess with that.”

“Thank you, after all, you are my best friend. You and Saito-dono, please continue to help me further.”

Hearing that, Louise became slightly tensed. How did Henrietta feel about Saito? Whether Henrietta noticed Louise’s insecurities or not, she smiled.

“Do not worry about him. I am sorry Louise, for what I did. I was lonely and needed a person to depend on, and I made this grave disservice.”

“P-Princess, what...”

“He is your knight; not mine. But at least for a little while I wanted to be like ‘Louise...’ Though it all ended in a big pain and now I feel uneasy thinking about it.

“Eh? Eeh?”

Even Louise's ears crimsoned. Henrietta gave a mischievous smile.

“Nee, Louise. Some time ago, we made a promise here... That whenever we will find a person we love, we would tell each other about it. Yet, I still haven’t heard your report.”

“...t-that's...because there is no person I l-love.”

Biting her lips, utterly embarrassed, Louise said.

“Liar. You are really bad at telling lies.”

“N-Not lies at all.”

Louise slipped under the sheets and covered herself with the futon. Henrietta jumped on her and started to tickle.

“Hey Louise! Speak out! Who do you love?”

“No... princess! I love no one in particular... hiyan!”

Tickling continued and Louise soon was tired out.

“If you are playing dumb about it, lets ask Cattleya-dono.”

“...Chii-nee-sama?”

“Yep. That’s right. In the past, from the window of this room, didn’t we use to sneak into Cattleya-dono's room?”

Henrietta’s face became one of a little girl’s, reliving old times again.

“Indeed that’s how it was. Because of princess' magic...”

“Yes. Back at that time I used to use the ‘Fly’ spell.”

Henrietta took Louise's hand with a cheerful expression.

“Well then, let’s go.”

“Eh? But...”

“When having love troubles, it is the best to ask a senior!”

Henrietta pulled Louise's hand, going to the window. A mild night spring wind danced outside.

Henrietta, set up the wand, clasped Louise's hand and stepped out to the gentle night sky.

Saito was resting his cheek against Cattleya's lap.

“Previously... When Cattleya-san praised my courage... To tell the truth I do not know if it is mine or not.”

“What do you mean?”

“Look, am I not Louise’s familiar? When I hear her utter a spell, I feel a boost in my courage in my mind. Derf... ah, that’s the name of my sword, once said ‘Listening to the master’s spell will give you courage, like a child hearing mother’s call reacts.’ In other words, my courage is...”

“So when you become a familiar, you gain that courage?”

“Yes. That’s why when I say to Louise ‘My courage,’ deep down, I am not very confident at all. That’s why deep in my heart I always doubt if it's me, or if it's the ‘Familiar’ who thinks like that.”

Cattleya patted Saito's head. It had a strangely smoothing effect on him, and the things that he kept hidden in the depths of his mind flowed easily out of his mouth.

“...such a mystery. Amazing.”

“What?”

“Like this, I recall mother. Though Cattleya-san doesn't look like her at all. However, it is warm somehow...”

“...I see.”

“It’s really mysterious. After coming to this world, I did not usually remember those things all that often.”

“To this world?”

Saito was startled by Cattleya’s question. He did not intend to say that he was

not a human from this world. But... since it was Cattleya he could as well say that.

“I am not person from this world.”

“...I see.”

“You are not surprised?”

“Somehow... No, I did not imagine you being from a different world... But I did get a feeling that you did differ from others and that you were not a common plebeian.”

Cattleya’s words reminded Saito of the words said on their previous meeting.

“It feels like you’re a completely different human from your very core. Are you?”

“Therefore, even if I’d want to meet my family, it is impossible to do so. However, I forgot about it for a long time. So why do I remember them now?”

“...maybe those feelings were suppressed.”

“Suppressed?”

“Yes. When something painful happens, human hearts tend to lock the painful events away from the mind. It’s not all that strange.”

“...”

“Surely, when you were brought to this world your mind was shocked. That’s why it locked the memories of your hometown so you would not remember them. Yet, there are ways; ways to find keys to unlock the mind...”

That’s right, Saito thought. Communication between Tabitha and her mother. Bonds between Louise and her parents... Maybe, seeing these kinds of things, the suppressed feelings were revived.

Feelings of homesickness. Feelings for his mother.

Saito shut his eyes.

“...and I am like your mother.”

Cattleya whispered.

“Ah, Cattleya-san is not my mother, you are different! And yet tears still fall. Tears...”

Trying not to look weak, Saito tried to make a joke, but it became useless, when tears started overflowing. Cattleya tightly embraced Saito.

“Good child. You are a strong child.”

Saito kept on weeping.

He cried like he hadn’t cried in a long time.

He couldn’t tell how long he cried this hard.

He was pressed close to Cattleya's chest while crying... and it mysteriously relieved his mind.

It slowly settled his heart down.

“Sorry... I don’t know what came over me.”

Saito said, while rubbing his nose.

“It’s nothing to be embarrassed about. When you want to cry, you should cry.”

“But...”

“Haah, what a sore loser you are. You don’t like showing your weakness to others, right?”

“It’s just not something a man should do.”

“So stubborn. But once in a while I think it's also necessary to depend on others too. You can‘t pent it all inside, not relying on anyone.”

Saito sighed. He was surrounded by women who relied on him. Though he was staying strong in the events... the truth was that he wanted to depend on someone too.

“...it might be so.”

“That different world... Is it possible to return there?”

“I don’t know. But, besides me, there was a person who came to this world from there, so... I may be able to return and I may be not able to.”

Cattleya looked straight at Saito.

“You will be able to return. You will be able to return, surely. And you will be able to meet your mother after some time. You will be able to return to your original family. I think so.”

Reassuring, Cattleya said. Saito nodded.

“Thank you very much.”

“Though I can’t console – Hah, I am sorry. If only my body were stronger - I would have helped you to look for the way to return... That’s right! Though it is impossible for me to be your mother, I can still be your elder sister.”

She said out of the blue. Saito was in panic.

“I-I-If I would have such beauty as my elder sister, I would return home early every day.”

“Come on, call me elder sister.”

Saito blushed.

“T-That... There’s no need for that.”

“There is a need for such thing. Come on, say it.”

When the gentle Cattleya urged him this way... Saito responded instinctively,

“O-onee-san.”

“There you go, it wasn’t so hard.”

Cattleya happily patted Saito's head.

“...yes.”

Something warm filled his mind. *There is a chance that I will never meet my family. However... there are a lot of people who are nice to me like this.*

Saito rubbed his eyelids.

“There’s no time for crying. There is a fellow who is aiming for... Louise’s

‘Void’ power. That person did cruel things to Tabitha and her mother. I will not forgive that guy.” *We have not met him yet, but we imagine that it may be Joseph, King of Gallia.*

What kind of guy he is?

It doesn’t matter... I won’t let him lay a finger on Louise or Tabitha anyway.

We’ll return home, after this story is finished.

“Just don’t overdo it, alright?”

Cattleya hugged Saito again.

“I don’t want anything else, just you and Louise to be safe.”

That moment, a loud sound of breaking glass echoed.

“W-What?!”

“Aitatatatatatatatatatatata...”

“Not good, added too much power.”

The ones that fell into the room, were no other than Louise and Henrietta. Then they both stood up while rubbing their hips in the pain, and then both stared with astonishment at Saito.

“Ara. Saito-dono?”

“W-What are you doing in here?!”

“That’s my line! Why did you both jump in through the window?!”

Without answering Saito’s question, Louise's eyes narrowed.

“Y-You are going after Chii-nee-sama now?! Unbelievableeeee!”

Her face flushed, Louise charged forward.

‘Gon!’

Louise’s jump-kick cut the three meters distance in no time and hit Saito on the temple. When Saito fell down, Louise straddled his waist and started to strangle him.

“Of all things, Chii-nee-sama! Of all things, Chii-nee-sama! Won’t allow! I won’t allow this!”

Then animals started to react to Louise’s shouts, who was straddling on top of Saito.

Waf, waf. Bow, wow. Meow, meow. Gao, gao. Buh, buh.

It was as if a lot of animals that began to lean on Saito were asking – “Can we play too?”

“Mgh...”

Saito’s consciousness started to slip away.

Louise looked down at Saito, who fainted, with demonic eyes.

“There’s no time to sleep!”

“Louise, Louise! You should not kick gentlemen like this!”

As might be expected, because Saito was kicked, Henrietta stepped in to end this.

Cattleya started to laugh out loud.

“Stop Louise. I did not try to take away your sweetheart.”

“He’s not my sweetheart! It’s different!”

Crimsoned, Louise waved her hand.

“...That, I only thought about dangers awaiting Chii-nee-sama. That was my only thought.”

“I only cured his injuries. Really.”

“...I did not miss this guy’s look. This fellow has absent-mindedly implanted his face in Chii-nee-sama’s cleavage. F-f-face buried between C-Chii-nee-sama’s breasts! H-how dare he! Chii-nee-sama’s breasts! B-b-b-b-breasts!”

In other words, Louise’s blood rushed to her head. And, because she lifted her leg for another kick, Henrietta had to step in again.

“Excuse me, Louise? Stop!”

“Stop, what for?!”

Henrietta smoothingly looked over the place and voiced her opinion with a forced smile.

“Well... umm, Cattleya-dono is just like Louise. Like her hair color. Therefore, Saito-dono has surely absent-mindedly regarded her a grown-up Louise.”

“Eh?”

Henrietta‘s simple words made Louise think.

“It’s hard to believe! That sort of...!”

Though Louise said that, waves of happiness filled her heart.

“Louise is really lucky, to have such great gentleman's feelings dedicated to her.” Cattleya added with a smile as well.

“S-s-s-such a bother.”

Embarrassed, Louise mumbled.

Later that night... laying unconscious, Saito was on the sofa, the three noble girls slept in one bed after a long time. Cattleya in the center, Louise on the left and Henrietta on the right.

“It has been such a long time since all three of us slept like this.”

Henrietta said in a cheerful voice.

“During the summers, Your Majesty used to visit our home a lot.”

“Yes. During those days I was really happy. Because there never was a thing to worry about…”

Looking distant, Henrietta said.

“We used to play a lot.”

“Oh Louise. In any case, we came to Cattleya-dono for some questions.”

The three girls were laughing and chatting happily for a while.

In the course of time, the conversation moved to Louise and Saito's relationship.

“Hey Louise, why are you always so violent towards Saito-dono?”

“N-not always.”

When asked by Cattleya Louise denied it, blushing hard.

“Always.”

Henrietta noted, making Louise even more perplexed.

“P-princess only witnesses the worst moments!”

Henrietta let out a loud sigh.

“Haah, if you keep doing that, he will hate you for it. However, Saito does look like he's infatuated with you, so there should be no problem with that.”

“As an older sister I do not agree with that. Such usual nastiness may make him run away. For example, remember what happened to elder sister Eléonore?”

In Louise’s mind, the image of her eldest sister, whose engagement was canceled, popped up.

“It is alright to allow gentlemen to act on their own once in a while. If you are angry at him just for speaking with other girls, he will end up disgusted sooner or later. It’s not just me. I do not want to see Louise taking older sister’s place in being disappointed with love.”

“D-don’t question such things! He is madly in love with me!”

Like a child she shouted, but Cattleya only shook her head to that.

“There is no such thing as a person who could not change their mind. Give him breathing space from time to time. If you do so, he will still return to the person he loves the most in the end.”

Louise became silent.

What Chii-nee-sama said was always correct.

Maybe she was indeed not giving him enough space.

Henrietta and Cattleya continued to give Louise advices one after another.

The chatter of three girls continued throughout the night.

Chapter Five: The New School Term

Saito and others didn't know what to do with so much free time before the new school term started.

Three days had passed since returning from Louise’s place. When they returned to the academy, it was basically the same daily life as usual.

“Tsk… He's clearly a bad guy, we can't just stand around and do nothing.”

In the hangout of the Ondine Knight Corps, Saito declared while resting his elbows on the table.

“When did you become so belligerent?”

Guiche asked as he gulped down his wine.

This was the place where noble boys used to drink recklessly after school, and if the teachers scowled at them, they would excuse it as a "training filth ." Because the Ondine Knight Corps were founded as the Queen's guards, the teachers could not complain once training was mentioned.

“Because it’s strange. They, umm, that Gallia. It’s a really big country. If they wanted to, they could attack Louise and me, and Tabitha and her mother, but for some reason they haven't done it.”

”They're just that kind of people. It wouldn't be too hard to get you in the cover of night. That’s why we need to be vigilant.”

Guiche answered nonchalantly, composing himself.

“I want to do something about Tabitha’s mother…”

“Well, it's nice and all, but what can we do about elven medicine? We're at a

dead end.”

Not disagreeing, Saito shook his head.

“Anyhow, the fact that Gallia's not sending an official protest is most satisfying. Isn't it strange when war doesn't break out when it usually should? The opponent is the king of the large country of Gallia. As said before, it's too big for common folk like us to understand.”

Certainly, Gallia had not figured out what to say yet.

Though that silence was eerie, sometimes there were circumstances never revealed to the public.

“The king of that large country, huh…”

Saito absentmindedly looked up into the sky. As had been said – he should have been happy returning alive rather than troubled about such things.

However, he could not allow himself that.

Saito began trying to figure out a course of action. However, nothing came to his mind. It was not just Gallia’s King Joseph with high ambitions - there was a Void user like Louise in Gallia as well. And, like him, a Void familiar…

A large country with the power of Void. It was too much of an opponent.

One cannot win just by swinging a sword alone – as he painfully admitted this, Guiche tapped his shoulder.

“Anyway! It is necessary for brave men like us to rest. Wouldn’t it be a grave loss to not enjoy life? Cheers, have a drink. Wasn’t it tough for you at Louise’s home?”

“C-Cheers…”

After all, it was far more challenging at Louise’s home than in Gallia. Tired and injured, Saito slept for a long time. He had only woken up that day at noon, and found neither Louise nor Siesta around.

Without him there, those fellows cut their classes, and were indulging themselves to binge for as long as three days and three nights. Soon after he arrived, Saito joined the clamor.

“Nooo, but, I have a great question! Because we invaded Gallia, Tabitha… wasn’t she a member of Gallia’s royal family? And we helped her! As one would expect from the Commander and Sub-Commander.”

One drunk member rattled. Guiche gladly shook his head.

“What good would that have been without your cover? You lured the Dragon Knight Corps to the Germanian border. When I become a general, I’ll reward you.”

“Indeed! We might have been useful after all!”

“Not just might! Ahahaha!”

“Hey Guiiiiche! Are you talking about Tabitha?!”

“Yup.”

Guiche nodded quickly.

“Watch your big mouth!”

“W-What is it! There isn’t anything to be concerned about, right?”

Guiche mumbled, when Saito began to strangle him.

“Watch who you're telling that to!”

“C-Calm down! I didn’t tell that to anyone else but the knight corps!”

“You're not lying?”

“I'm not. I'm smart enough to not be so easily elated.”

“For your sake, I hope you're not.”

While such private exchange were heating up, the fat Malicorne appeared with

first year schoolgirls at his side.

“Malicorne-sama! You are so cool!”

“Please, let us hear the story again!”

They were somewhat cute girls. Malicorne was wearing a hat with big feathers for some reason, and a shirt like Guiche's. "What’s up?" – the guys from knight corps started gathering around.

“It’s embarrassing Kaneko-chan. But I guess it cannot be helped.”

“Kiyaaaaaa! Great!”

Malicorne pointed with a finger, proud as a peacock, and the surrounding girls started to squeal from joy.

“Well, I went to Alhambra Castle, and put the commanders and their subordinates to sleep! And then the elf appeared!“

“Kiya, kiya!”

“Then I pulled out my wand fearlessly and shouted, ‘Oi, long-eared rascal! If you value your life, let the princess go! If not, then, stronger than any magic in existence, my wind spell will gush out…’ Ah, of course, Princess Tabitha. It’s that small girl."

“You are so cool! Talking down to an elf!”

“Well I have to admit, those kind of superficial guys are easy to beat. If I am serious, puff! – and they fly high. Puff.”

“Youuuuuuuu! ‘Puff’ this!”

Saito’s flying kick slammed right into Malicorne’s solar plexus.

“Gugh!”

Malicorne somersaulted down.

However, he stood up with a red face.

“Ha, Saito, because today I have this gorgeous aura around me, I’ll take it calmly. But attack again – and I will join the Dragon Knight Corps.”

“Y-You, this…you have no common sense…”

Saito’s shoulders were trembling with anger when he started beating Malicorne, "bang bang."

“Noo, be nice, hero. These girls, by all means, want to hear about your adventures. Speak up, Sub-Commander-san.”

“You are that Saito-dono?”

Girls with long hair surrounded Saito from left to right. The first year students’ eyes were sparkling like stars as they gazed at Saito. Behind them was Katie from before.

She triumphantly patted a first-year’s shoulders.

“Indeed. This person is the Sub-Commander of the Undine Knight Corps, Saito-dono. When you hear of the many adventures that Saito-dono had, it will dazzle you like a brilliant star!”

“Nooo! Great!”

The first year girls shouted joyfully. Saito gradually relaxed his serious expression.

“I-It’s too much…”

“Tell us about your adventures!”

Then, Guiche stuck his face over from the back.

“Then ask the commander. The commander…”

With a rose between his teeth, he gracefully posed.

“This guy is from the Gramont family!”

“It’s Guiche-sama! So handsome!”

Guiche trembled.

“Say that some more.”

“Eh?”

“More, repeat the words you just said.”

“H-Handsome…”

Guiche thrust out both hands and placed them in front of his face. Then, he began swirling his hair around his right finger.

“The commander of the Ondine Knight Corps of the Water Spirit, Guiche de Gramont. There is no more excellent commander of such boorish fellows than I. My, you are so cute. No, you are probably the holy woman Joanna that they draw in all religious paintings! You might be a rose after all. My goodness, if you are not the best rose!”

With increasing elaborate vocabulary, Guiche continued wooing the girl.

“Ne, Saito-dono.”

Shaking her long, straight, hazel hair, Katie drew closer.

“W-What?”

“We formed a female support group!”

“Support group?”

“Yes! It was organized between the first and second years. Ne~”

The schoolgirls around her gave cute nods.

“Doesn’t the Ondine Knight Corps have a lot of things to do? So we thought that us girls could help when necessary.”

“Help?”

At Saito’s vacant look, Katie, with some rustling, took out the basket at her side.

“Yes! We prepared some dishes for now! Please eat it during your training.”

When Katie tried to set her dish, the door opened with a loud bang, and maids jumped in from the kitchen with Siesta in front.

“Siesta!”

Siesta and her maids were holding large dishes.

“Saito-san! Despite all my worries from you sleeping so long after your return, you seem to be surprisingly energetic!”

“T-Thank you.”

One after another, Siesta’s housemaids started setting dishes on the table.

“Wait! Don’t be so selfish!”

Noble schoolgirls started complaining about the commoner maid.

However, Siesta stared back at Katie, unwavering.

“When nobles cook, our heads roll! Isn’t that right everyone?”

"That’s right, that’s right", said the maids as they nodded.

“That’s why we will take care of the meals for the Knight Corps. The Misses must work hard at studying.”

With determined face, Siesta began setting dishes on the table.

Katie got angry, took a placed dish and began eating while mumbling.

“Please do not eat that!”

“Commoner’s taste is so saucy!”

The maids and the support group turned against each other, and cat fights eventually broke out. Saito was experiencing heaven and hell at the same time.

Malicorne tried to stop the conflict.

“Please stop fighting over me!” he shouted, but was sent flying by kicks from both sides.

Then every one from the Knight Corps got involved, and chaos erupted in their hangout.

The scene was witnessed by three third-year girls from a window. They were Louise, Montmorency, and Kirche.

Montmorency watched Guiche's attitude, furious.

“Not again! Not again! What’s with the ‘I’m your knight’ thing?! Really! Let’s settle this once and for all! Louise! Come with me!”

Shouting, she turned towards the exit. Louise didn’t move.

“What is it, Louise? You saw it too, right? Saito is being hit on not only by that maid, but also by the celebrity of the first-years - Katie, and right under your nose, too. Don’t you want to do something about it?”

Yet, Louise's answer defied Montmorency's expectations.

“It’s alright. Calm down.”

That sort of attitude from Louise shocked Kirche.

“It can’t be, Louise. Is there something wrong with you?”

“There's nothing wrong. It’s pointless to get angry at this familiar every single time. So…”

Louise said with a clear face.

“He's madly in love with me anyway. Such a bother. Or should I say trouble. So I don't empathize much, but - my, my...those children, they don't know that stupid dog, and fight over passing and not passing dishes. Those girls with small brains can't see that...that stupid dog is only crazy about his Master...”

With a serious look, Kirche placed her hand against Louise’s forehead.

“No fever.”

“Louise, did you drink some weird potions lately?”

Concerned, Montmorency asked.

“I haven’t drank any. Perhaps, Montmorency, I should tell you too.”

“And what would you tell?”

“That to be a good woman, space is important. This is a part of nobility.”

“But didn’t you give up your noble status to the Princess earlier?”

Though it was calmly pointed out by Kirche, Louise shook her head and as if relieved said:

“Princess-sama is a very wonderful person after all. I was impressed to hear her thoughts. Therefore, I decided to serve loyally again.”

“Something strange must have happened between you and Her Majesty.”

Montmorency and Kirche nodded, looking at each other.

“Nothing's strange! Anyway, the important thing, as I said, is to give the gentleman some space!”

“My, Louise, that’s your strategy? Can you handle such a strategy?”

Kirche made a dazzling smile.

“What s-strategy?! There is no strategy, I am loved and that’s all!”

Blushing, Louise denied Kirche's words.

“Excuse me, Louise. You teach a nice thing, but do you really feel this way?”

Kirche placed an arm on Louise’s shoulder.

“Because you are such fun, let me help you with your romance too. Take it as gratitude for the whole Gallia operation. I could give it to you. If you learn the

tricks of love, you could be even more attractive, right?“

“There is no need to!”

“Ah, I see. Then I won’t give it.”

After these words, Louise’s curiosity rose.

“O-Only to see how it looks.”

“Excuse me Louise, but you are asking the Ardent for adult woman's advice? Understood?”

Advice.

That word revived a lot of failures in her mind.

Black cat suit.

Sailor uniform.

Such memories made Louise grow more and more embarrassed.

“No good. Others' advice always fails. That’s how it usually turns out.”

“Whose advice?”

“S-Sword’s.”

“That talking sword of Saito's? You don’t really mean to treat that iron board’s advice on the same level as veteran in romance's - Kirche’s?”

Honesty, she did not like this woman - Kirche von Zerbst. However…she certainly had to recognize her arts and wiles in love. After all, the La Vallière lovers had been stolen away by Kirche's clan throughout their entire lineage's history...

Louise said in a shaky voice, still struggling to maintain her dignity:

“W-Well, since I have nothing to do, I could keep you company for a short while.”

“Great. It will be fun!”

“M-Me too – it won’t hurt to listen.”

Montmorency said with a blush on her cheeks.

“Alright then. I’ll take good care of you.”

Louise and Montmorency went into Kirche's room. As usual, it was a very gorgeous room. There were two wardrobes by the west wall, each larger than a bed, reaching from the floor to ceiling, which had a giant mirror in between. Lacy curtains hung from the ceilings; sculptures, paintings, and various works of art were placed all over the room.

Kirche, looking very eager, sat on the bed and ordered them both:

“Alright, take them off.”

“Yes?”

Louise and Montmorency had vacant expressions.

“Take them off. Now, I’m telling you to show the Ardent what kind of undergarments you wear.”

The two pupils blushed hard and protested.

“Hey Kirche, I clearly said that I have no interest in such hobbies!”

“Me neither!”

“Neither do I, but I cannot teach you about love otherwise. I am the teacher; you are my pupils, so be completely obedient.”

“Stop joking!”

The two girls trembled with anger and shouted.

“What about you? If your lover sways in another direction, how will you stop him from swaying in that direction? Indeed, I understand Guiche and Saito's feelings. When you are both so temperamental, it’s no wonder why they go flirt with other girls.”

“Ku...“ Montmorency and Louise clenched their fists with deep regret.

“Quickly, take off your shirt and skirt and show me what underwear you wear.”

In a determined way, Montmorency took off her shirt. Under it appeared the skinny body of Montmorency.

“Take it off!”

Seeing her like that, Louise stripped off her shirt as well.

“Skirts too.”

Hands crossed, Kirche ordered with a happy-from-the-bottom-of-her-heart voice. With a "Haaa!" shout, Louise unfastened her skirt, allowing it to pool down on the floor in a circle around her feet.

Watching back and forth from Montmorency to Louise, Kirche began commenting.

“You really are children.”

“W-W-W-Whyyy?!”

“Do you really show such underwear to your lover?”

“I don’t show it! I just wear it!”

Louise and Montmorency weren't wearing particularly eccentric underwear. They were white and neat, but they both had similar camisoles. Though they had lacy decorations around the edges and quite detailed texture, they indeed looked childish.

“Well, you...”

“What?!”

“A woman, who doesn't value her underwear won’t be valued by a man either.”

The two went "Ugh" and shut up.

“You bought those from shops under recommendations of coming and going merchants, didn’t you? Those people, because you are students, naturally, only chose the ones with such childish designs.“

Kirche ordered the salamander, which was lying down in the corner of a room:

“Flame, please bring us the parents' family baggage from back then.”

"Kyuru kyuru" - while barking, the salamander dragged the old baggage from under the bed. Kirche pointed at two of them with her chin.

“Why don’t you open it?”

Louise and Montmorency looked at each other, and together opened the baggage.

“Wha-!”

“W-What’s this! Lewd! So lewd!”

Seeing the undergarments inside - they were both shocked. Then, instinctively, they covered their faces with their hands. Kirche finished, proudly swirling her hair.

“These are the ones I used to wear as a child. They should be suitable sizes for you, right?”

Though the words damaged their pride, or maybe because of that, the two girls

did not reply with anything.

“Remember, underwear is a woman’s weapon. It’s the spell that captures men's minds. Showing them gives you a mature woman’s aura.”

Chapter Six: Private Lesson

Now, in the middle of the huge uproar, Saito managed to slip away and found himself in front of a library. The library was located in a tower. At the entrance, a librarian wearing glasses sat and checked the students and teachers who went in and out. Books were heavily guarded in there because they had the components of magic potions written in them, and couldn't be handed out to a simple commoner.

A young librarian girl glanced at Saito and confirmed his mantle, then returned to reading a book.

Hm, knighthood is useful after all – thinking so, Saito entered the library.

“Wow. It’s amazing.”

The size of the library's bookcases was overwhelming.

Some were as much as thirty mails in height. It was an incredible height. Apparently, the library occupied the larger part of this tower. Anyways, facing such a huge amount of books, Saito hesitated.

It was somewhere around 8 PM. A whole eternity – thinking so, Saito took one book in his hands. The characters of Halkeginia’s alphabet were written there.

Though he stared at them for a while, he was not able to understand any of them.

“Dang, pretty tough…”

Saito came to look at the books in order to memorize what characters mean. *There is a new enemy - the king of a large country. It is absurd to only swing a sword. Being a knight, one cannot just rely on talking, but needs to write as well* - he thought.

“I wonder if they have a Japanese dictionary.”

Of course, there was no such thing.

But how could he talk?

When he asked Derflinger some time ago, he answered, *“Though I do not understand it well, I guess it’s something you gain when you pass the gate to this world.”*

Well, seems like magic anyhow. And thanks to this magic, everyone can communicate by speech.

Flying and jumping, putting out fires, healing injuries, making strong love potions – considering all that, Saito was not surprised by such magic.

Possibly, it may be related to Louise's "Void."

Being in charge of Louise, he did not understand what the magic exactly was, but it was not hard to assume that there was some kind of translating magic as well.

However, I want learn the characters in any case - Saito thought.

Wondering what to do, he turned his head, and at a distant table saw a familiar face.

“Tabitha.”

It was the girl with short blue hair. Since the rescue, they had hardly talked. She had that atmosphere of not being easy to talk to, then there was going to Louise's family, thus it was too hectic.

However, why, after leaving her mother in Germania, did she return to the Academy of Magic again? - Saito approached Tabitha and said.

“Yo.”

He thought he would be disregarded as usual, but this time it was different. Tabitha shut the book she was reading and looked up at Saito.

“Yes?”

Tabitha answered looking at Saito with round, puppy-like eyes. Saito was somewhat at a loss by such a surprising attitude.

“No, that…it’s not like it’s my business, but are you alright...?”

“I’m alright.”

“I-I see… Aah, I have something to say. Seems like Guiche, well, blurted out who you really are. You are a Gallian princess… r-right? That was stupid.”

Tabitha shook her head.

“Doesn’t matter. It’s the truth anyway.”

“I-I see. But didn’t you want to hide that? You were using a false name…”

“It does not matter now. I do not mind.”

Tabitha said as a matter-of-fact.

“Is your mother alright?”

To this question, Tabitha hesitated a little bit.

“Her mind is at peace in Germania.”

Whether it meant what it meant, he hesitated to ask any further. Surely, Tabitha’s thoughts were Tabitha’s after all.

Besides that, she was a reticent girl to start with, Saito thought the flood of questions would be pitiable. Even now it may still be impossible to answer.

“I see, understood. Sorry for disturbing your reading.”

He turned to leave while laughing.

“Do you read as well?”

She asked.

Because it was the first time that Tabitha asked about something, Saito was confused.

“Eh?”

He instinctively asked back.

“Did you also come to read?”

“Aah, it’s different, different. Far from reading, it would be difficult as I am not even able to read the letters of this world…”

“This world?”

When being asked back, Saito panicked.

Tabitha didn’t know he wasn’t a human from this world. It was Henrietta, Louise, Siesta, Cattleya, Tiffania, Osman and Colbert…who knew. That was pretty much it.

Even his colleagues from The Undine Knight Corps do not know.

“Hey, because I am a former commoner, I cannot read the characters. However, because I became a knight, I thought that I could learn a little. However…it is impossible after all. It’s just gobbledygook.”

Then, Tabitha abruptly stood up and left the book she was holding.

“Ah, oi.”

Though he called her to stop, Tabitha flew up to the high to the bookshelf using the spell. Not being able to fly and her being about twenty mails off the ground, Saito could not stop her.

And just when he started to think that they may disturb the readers and that he should get out of the library, Tabitha suddenly landed right in front of him.

“Uwaa!”

Tabitha abruptly thrust out the book to the surprised Saito.

“…eh?”

“If it’s this book - it should be easy.”

Apparently, this book was for learning the letters – just the book he was searching for. However, the really surprising thing was the usually indifferent to others Tabitha. He took it while thinking what on earth was the matter with Tabitha, when she said surprising words.

“I’ll teach the characters.”

“Yes?”

“If you just stare at the book you won’t learn anything.”

“No, well, that is right, however…is it alright? It would be pretty difficult I think. I'm not the brightest student.

“Don't care.”

Then Tabitha took Saito's hand and walked him over to sit at the table.

The characters of Halkeginia were a little bit different when looking at the alphabet. Slowly, Tabitha taught him the pronunciation of the characters.

“A, B, C.”

Though he heard the sounds somewhere, it was not possible to recall them well. Maybe it was because he only heard them.

Tabitha continued to point at each one of the characters, patiently teaching him the meaning.

But somehow, the words started to mysteriously turn into… "Prologue" and "August" and "I."

Once he heard them, they were converted to Japanese again.

Probably, Tabitha pronounced them in Halkeginian. However, when they reached his ears, they turned back into Japanese.

But, as Tabitha continued to teach the meaning of the words little by little, sentences that he had seen only as a random mess of characters up till now, slowly gained an understandable meaning just from his watching alone. As if they were translated inside his head.

Once he got the hang of it, it started to run more smoothly.

And after one hour, he could already read basic sentences. So Saito, using an easy book as a textbook, was able to read out.

“What does it mean?”

Not changing her usual tone, Tabitha asked.

“Eh?”

Tabitha pointed at one sentence.

“Here, it’s written ‘No use crying over spilt milk.’ However, you read it as ‘An irreparable event happened.’”

“No, that’s just the way I read. Sorry, is it a bad thing?”

Tabitha shook her head.

“No. You are not wrong. Sentences like ‘No use crying over spilt milk’ are idiomatic expressions. Their meaning is certainly ‘An irreparable event happened.’”

Tabitha continued to speak.

“It's subtly different the way you read written sentences. But it is not wrong. It is often summarized instead, to give an expression adequate to the context. Entire sentences can be grasped by just a few words. Indeed, it is like dog or cat familiar being able to speak human language. However, the summary does not explain the reason. In such cases you cannot read like you did just now.”

Tabitha looked at Saito with clear blue eyes.

In these cold-looking eyes, Saito felt a faint glimmer of curiosity. *Tabitha wanted to learn the truth. Of who I am…*

“That's really strange. Ah, how do I put this, well, to be honest, I'm not really reading, in a sense. I think that while the literal meanings of the individual words and phrases that Tabitha is teaching me is a clue, but what I understand directly

is the underlying 'meaning' of what is written.”

“Why?”

“I think it’s because I am not a human from this world. Maybe it’s because my words are different from Tabitha’s and others. In other words, a word is already directly translated in my head…maybe that’s why there are those subtle changes? Aah, that’s how it is!”

Unnoticed to Saito, he started to shout.

“For the book – it is translated in my head at once, just like the words of this world are translated after they leave my mouth.”

Just like when sentences written in Japanese are translated to English. And when that English sentence is translated back to Japanese again, there are some subtle changes from the first sentence. That’s what happens when I read a book Saito thought.

Indeed, it must be so, yes, he realized, and then was asked by Tabitha.

“This world?”

“Damn!”

Because of such turn of events, Saito had to explain the circumstances to Tabitha. Since Tabitha was sharp, he couldn't hide it from her any longer.

“So… A person from a different world.”

Hearing Saito’s story, Tabitha narrowed her eyes a little.

“Do you believe me?”

“You do not tell a lie.”

Tabitha said, looking straight at Saito.

These words made Saito’s heart beat faster. Embarrassed for some reason, Saito

turned his face away from her. Being looked like this by this small young girl, his heart throbbed and it was hard to meet her eyes staring straight at him.

“Do you want to return?”

“Eh?”

“To your home…to your mother, do you want to return?

“I want to return.”

Saito said.

“Then why…”

Do you not return? That’s what she was probably wondering.

Saito shook his head.

“It’s because I cannot find the way to return.”

“You just have to look for it.”

“I don’t have a clue.”

“You do not seem like you are looking for it.”

Tabitha said. Hearing that, Saito lowered his head.

“No…rather than not wanting to return, I cannot afford to leave.”

“What do you mean?”

“There is a fellow who is aiming for Louise's power…”

“Void?”

“You knew?”

“I understood when I saw it.”

Tabitha said calmly, leaving the other world issue behind. Indeed, it might have been useless to keep any secret from this girl who was extremely knowledgeable.

“Anyway, since I have someone to protect, I cannot leave the place. Besides…”

“Besides?”

“I was gifted with Gandálfr’s power. Having such power, I may be able to do something for this world…that’s another reason.”

Tabitha said with conviction. “It is unreasonable.”

“Eh?”

“Inside, you feel like you belong to this world’s people and you say what you feel."

Saito was shocked. Then Tabitha whispered silently,

“…you are a hero of this land.”

“What?”

It was so quiet that he could not hear it well. Tabitha lowered her eyes and shook her head.

“Nothing.”

After these two questions, silence settled in. Somehow, the atmosphere became awkward.

The librarian stuck her head into the reading room, and informed them that the library would soon be closing. Saito happily stood up.

“Thank you. You helped me a lot. Now I can study alone.”

Tabitha shook her head.

“I will supervise it till the end.”

“Eh?”

“There are difficult words. Runes too. It’s impossible to study alone.”

It might have been the way she said it. However, he thought that it would be bad to make her help him any further.

“No, I’d feel bad for hogging your reading time…”

“Don’t care.”

When Tabitha said so, she took yet another book out of the same bookshelf.

“Next textbook.”

“Now? Isn’t it already getting late?”

Showing no hesitation, Tabitha nodded.

After providing the hangout with food, Siesta and the others went back to clearing rooms and cleaning tables. When they returned and peeped into the hangout again, they could see drunken apprentice knights and students, but there was no Saito. So they never found out whether their dishes or the noble girls’ were more delicious.

I wanted to ask Saito for his impression, thought Siesta while going back to her room.

“Miss Vallière?”

Siesta looked at the pink-haired girl who was Saito's master. No, the girl in there was…

“A bad imitation of Madam Butterfly?”

Louise walked towards Siesta with her hands crossed in front. For some reason she was swaying her hips with each step. Noticing Siesta, she let her arms drop to her sides - though she looked like the usual Louise, something was amiss.

“Who are you calling a bad imitation?”

“S-Sorry! But why are you dressed like that — is this some kind of costume party? But I haven't heard of one…”

“Why costume party?”

Louise stared intensely at Siesta.

“B-Because, for Miss Vallière to wear that…”

Shocked, Siesta looked at Louise's clothes. Usually Louise would wear a long, cute camisole.

Yet, what Louise wore today was a black babydoll.

Louise, with a composed expression on her face, sat down on the bed and crossed her legs.

“Hmph...”

“Ha—”

Siesta tried hard to suppress her laughter. Louise quickly stood up and took out the riding crop from the drawer behind Siesta.

“Tell me. What are you laughing for?”

“I'm n-not laughing at all!”

Louise, as if remembering something, moved away from Siesta.

“I should not. A mature woman wouldn’t be angered this easily.”

“For an adult, your chest pretty much still falls behind…”

Said Siesta pointing at the chest area of the babydoll. Louise’s cheek started to twitch.

But Louise shook her head and said:

“Breast size is unrelated to the charm of a lady. The important part is behavior, education, and…”

“And?”

“Atmosphere.”

She said lazily, curling her hair with her fingers.

Hah, seems like someone convinced Louise to wear another strange outfit. Black cat, maid…and now a mature woman Siesta guessed.

“However, somehow I think it should be a much stronger atmosphere…”

After hearing what was said, Louise turned around.

“It is different. You are mistaken. Don't you know? Saito is crazy about me.”

“Eh, then you don’t think Saito is drawn towards the Queen? Do you know Saito so well? Can Miss Vallière reach his deepest feelings? I think it's a difficult thing to know.”

Louise stopped triumphantly curling her hair.

“It’s stupid — I was chosen.”

“Eh.”

“The Princess said so herself. Right now, Saito sees only me. What a bother! For me, even though it’s love, it is…t-troublesome. Well, I feel sorry, so I go along with those feelings.”

Louise said with glee, striking a pose in front of the mirror. Siesta coldly watched Louise.

“You look awfully happy about that, though.”

“A-Anyway, I do not value it but I do not disregard it. But it would be hard to be valued when you don’t dress well. It’s not just big breasts and the empty head of the maid, it’s different here. How about that? Does it suit me?”

Calmly, Siesta said,

“Poorly.”

After a long silence, Louise took out her wand, and started poking Siesta with it.

“What was that? What was that? What was that?”

“Because! Miss Vallière’s body is far from an adult’s in every respect. So, only cute clothes suit her body!”

Then Louise stood up and turned her back towards Siesta.

“Sooner or later, the atmosphere will come out.”

“Come out?”

“Come out. It’s what I said. Mood is important.”

“B-Being an adult is nice but…as promised before, could you loan me something to wear for one day?”

“Something you like? I don’t mind.”

“Really? Is it alright?”

“It's alright. Can’t break a promise that’s made by a mature woman. I’ll diligently keep the promise.”

“If that's so, I'll take it then. I wonder what dress to wear. Hmm.“

“If you like, I can lend you any of these clothes.”

“Truly?!”

Then Siesta danced with joy and opened the closet.

“I can actually wear them, how about this dress? Hey, this!”

Louise had once worn it — it was a black dress. The neckline was pretty deep and it was sleeveless.

“You like something this plain? Hm, I have a lot that are similar to that one.”

Siesta gladly put on the black dress.

“Uwa…great! And this fabric stretches too.”

Siesta, wearing Louise's dress, struck a happy pose in front of the mirror.

“Uwaa, it shows the body lines well. No, it is perfect. Don’t say this dress is plain♪. Bit embarrassing though… This…”

While saying so, with a smirk on her face, Siesta bent over. Certainly, the black dress emphasized the wonderful chest of Siesta that threatened to burst out at any moment, and with each movement it sunk lower.

The white valley between her breasts, stretching the opening further, seemed to

emphasize her words.

Siesta displayed her arsenal to Louise.

“How about it? Do you get a mature atmosphere from this?”

“It is different. He likes tiny girls like me. Therefore, the Princess and you should not have false hopes.”

“Tsk, but he sure watches cleavage with a great interest.”

“Only because they are unnaturally big. Surely it’s just a biological curiosity. Alright? I do not need clothes to make a mature atmosphere. I, myself, am a small lady who has a mature atmosphere around her. Moreover, that’s why I am generously not getting angry. Yeah, because I am unrivaled.”

“Is that so?”

“It is so.”

Louise hit another pose while humming. Siesta, on the other hand, did not look convinced by Louise’s performance…and when she glanced over the window, she shouted,

“Saito!”

“Saito? The door is still closed.”

“Not there, outside the window!”

“Yes?”

Louise pushed her head out of the window.

“W-What’s the meaning of this!?”

It was Saito and Tabitha, who was leading him by the hand, walking together up the moonlit stairs to Tabitha’s room. In an instant, Louise dashed out of the room, stormed up the stairs, jumping two steps at once, and, with a loud *Bam!*, tore Tabitha’s room’s door open.

The small, dark figure of Tabitha sat at her desk and Saito stood beside her. They both turned around at the same time.

“What, Louise? What’s the matter?”

Saito asked with a blank look on his face.

Louise was boiling with anger. However, she firmly held that anger down.

Control yourself, control yourself.

A mature woman would not be getting angry.

Besides, it's still not clear if he had an affair to begin with…

Looking around the room, Louise started curling her hair.

“Um, you. What are you doing in here?”

“Well, learning the words.”

“Words?”

“Yep. Wouldn’t it be convenient to read the words of this world?”

It seemed like Saito was learning the words from Tabitha.

Louise’s cheek twitched. *Why couldn’t you tell me? Why didn’t you ask me if you wanted to learn how to read?*

However, Louise swallowed the pain.

Today I am an adult. Today I am a lady. '

Louise touched the place of her palm where she had written "lady."

In her mind, the mature Louise calmed down the raging child Louise.

Alright? Child Louise. You are a mature woman, right, so do not forget that attitude.

Pretending to be all cool and calm, Louise asked Saito,

“You didn’t consider asking someone else to teach you?”

“Because Tabitha offered to teach me.”

This reticent girl started a conversation by herself?

Louise stole a glance at Tabitha. However, Tabitha seemed to be expressionless as usual. No feelings could be read from her eyes. But...her holding a romantic interest in Saito still seemed impossible.

Maybe she just expressed her gratitude for the help.

Feeling relieved, confidence boiled up again.

At any rate, the current me emits a lot of charm.…

“Eh?”

Louise saw Saito averting his eyes in embarrassment.

Augh. Not good.

I just burst in here wearing nothing but underwear!

Dressed in this, I dashed wildly through the corridor and intruded into someone's room. Though she was ready to die from shame, Louise tried to endure it. And she was so close to dying.

For something trivial like learning words…

I have to appear like the mature me again.

Coming to see the room like this would have a big impact, wouldn’t it?

Hmm, her mind started to work furiously.

Whatever, I’ll just use this mature attraction to completely turn him into my slave forever — Louise finally decided triumphantly.

Fuun, Louise nonchalantly placed her hand against the wall and thrust her hips to the side.

To fascinate Saito, in an act that she herself thought to be sexually charming, she started to lightly suck on her finger.

“W-Wait. W-What’s this. This look…”

Get it. Not get it. Stupid dog.

Do you finally notice the attractiveness of the mature me?

Caught in the moment, Louise placed her right hand behind her neck, turned her hips, and threw a tempting glance to Saito through the corner of her eyes. Louise’s slender limbs created a tense atmosphere.

Saito's face reddened more and more. The expressionless face of Tabitha, sitting by his side, was not fazed at all.

“It’s ridiculous. That…”

Ridiculous?

This is my power.

Hey, dog.

Do you notice, dog?

Have you noticed your mistress’s unexpected charming side?

Now then, why don’t you swear your eternal servitude to me?

Louise pulled out her final trump.

Guiding her right hand from her hair onto her breasts, she let her left hand slip down and slightly lift her babydoll’s hem up.

“Hey, stop doing this embarrassing stuff in front of me!”

Saito finally erupted. To Louise, it sounded like a loud hymn of her triumph.

“Not picchibichi!”

Eh? Picchibichi?

“Siesta, is that Louise’s dress? Do not wear it! It's not your size! I can see all your parts, all your body lines clearly, so I do not know where to place my eyes anymore! What if someone else sees that!”

I see.

Louise’s triumphant song broke with a loud ugly noise.

Siesta, who stood next to Louise, tried to cover herself.

“Don’t stare at me this much, it's embarrassing!”

“You are the one who is embarrassing! Hey!”

Saito blushed and turned his eyes away.

Louise asked Saito in a tiny voice.

“W-What about your mistress?”

“Ah? No, Louise, you look kind of awkward wearing this. Is this a curtain?”

Curtain?

Louise's shoulders began to tremble.

Tabitha politely coughed.

“Doesn’t suit.”

At the same time, Saito burst out laughing.

“Uwaa, Louise! What’s this! Could it be a babydoll dress?! No, it hung so loosely on you that I thought it was a curtain!”

Then, Louise silently drove both of her feet into Saito’s plexus with a skillful flying kick.

Once Saito hit the wall and fainted in agony, Louise aimed her wand.

“Die you, then resurrect, and then die again — you need to die at least twice for this!”

But Tabitha, with her staff readied, blocked her.

“What?! You?!”

“I won’t allow you to lay your hand on this person anymore.”

Though her words were purely defensive, Louise took them in a different meaning.

“So, you already laid your hands on her? No, it wasn’t just hands.”

“That…”

“A c-child who is smaller than I, s-s-smaller than I! Smaller than I!”

Thinking that her only advantage was denied, trembling, Louise aimed and lowered the wand.

“Uwaa!”

Saito covered himself.

However...nothing happened.

The sound of the explosion that he feared did not come.

“Huh?”

Louise’s surprised voice rang instead.

“What? What’s wrong?”

“It doesn't work. The ‘Explosion’ spell doesn’t work!”

“Narrow escape from death.”

Saito sighed in relief, while Louise was already half-frantic.

“Eeeeeh!? How!? Why doesn't it work!?”

Chapter Seven: The Pope Of Romalia

Seeing the guest who came to the royal reception room, Henrietta could only stare in blank surprise.

His dark-purple priest robes and high cylindrical hat symbolized the highest authority among all of Halkeginia's priesthood… in other words – he was the Pope of Romalia.

Because he held a position higher than any king in Halkeginia, Henrietta invited him to take the most honorable seat.

However, the young man's face did not suit well with the priest clothes that he wore. His gentle eyes, sculpturesque nose, and well-shaped lips formed into an ever-present smile - beauty that made everyone turn to look. Even if one searched all the theaters in Halkeginia, it would be difficult to find an actor as beautiful as him.

To Henrietta, it seemed that his smile was filled with godlike affection.

"Doing well, Henrietta-dono?"

Ashamed, Henrietta snapped out of her trance.

"I am sorry, Your Holiness. I was deeply moved by your holy power."

His hair, like thin gold threads, shivered as the Pope of Romalia laughed.

"Call me Vittorio. I don't like such formal manners. Treat me like a regular priest of the country."

"That is gracious of you. I am very sorry I could not attend the enthronement ceremony."

Vittorio Serevare St. Aegis the 32nd had been enthroned three years ago. Though it was a custom for each of Halkeginia’s royal families to attend the ceremony, Henrietta had caught a cold and was not able to be there.

St. Aegis the 32nd… the one who succeeded the name of "Founder's Shield," the thirty-second Pope. A very young person who had just passed twenty years of age, and though Henrietta had heard rumors that he was a very handsome person, she didn’t think it would be to that degree.

“I don't mind. Enthronement is just a ceremony. You still follow God and are the Founder's pious servant; that is enough for me.”

It is said that despite his young age, St. Aegis the 32nd received ardent support from the Romalian citizens. The reason for that was because there was a special liberal feeling that surrounded him. To a degree, Henrietta could relate to that, as she could not feel anything haughty in this young Pope either.

However… though nice, it was a really unexpected visit.

St. Aegis the 32nd announced his visit to Tristain just two days before. The palace went in an uproar preparing for the sudden guest. After all, the Pope’s visits were very rare.

The last time the Pope had come as a guest was for the coronation of the King, her father.

So the reason for such a sudden visit of St. Aegis the 32nd was a mystery.

During the rushed dinner between the Queen and the Prime Minister Mazarin, Henrietta discussed the problems regarding the reception.

“However, as expected from the rumored Halkeginia’s Flower, Henrietta-dono is really beautiful. I am extremely honored to meet you. If I were not the priest, I would ask you to dance.”

“Can I ask something?”

“What?”

“Can I learn the reason for such an unexpected visit?”

Surely, he did not come here just to have idle chat.

St. Aegis the 32nd gave a deep sigh.

“Henrietta-dono, what do you think about the prior campaign?”

The war in Albion. The league of nobles who introduced themselves as Reconquista, the destruction of Albion’s royal family, the war started by the union of all nobles who did not rely on a monarchic government and sought the Holy Land…

The war between Reconquista and the united Tristain-Germania army, the sudden intervention of Gallia, which ended in the victory of the Allied Forces…

The war that took away Henrietta’s beloved.

She did not want to recall that difficult war.

Henrietta lowered her head in sadness.

“It was a sad war.”

“…”

“I would not want to repeat such a war a second time, I think.”

St. Aegis the 32nd nodded approvingly.

“Seems like Henrietta–dono is my friend.”

“What do you mean?”

“It means that I agree. I too was grieved at heart by such a war. I was determined to let the militia participate as well, as soon as possible, because I wanted this useless war to be over with.”

Useless war… at such words, Henrietta's heart reacted strongly.

“Is it because it was not profitable?”

St. Aegis the 32nd gave a big nod.

“It is as Henrietta-dono says. Such conflict has no benefit. I am always troubled because of this. We are all Founder Brimir's pious servants, so why should we fight against each other?”

Henrietta answered in a constrained voice.

“Though I am immature as a politician… I think that as long as people have desires, wars will never be over.”

“Founder Brimir also acknowledged the existence of desire. When desire captivates a person, he is likely to stray away from the path of righteousness. That’s why self-control is beautiful. We, priests, vow celibacy and once a week devote ourselves to vegetarian ration in order to not forget self-control.”

“If all people could control themselves like his Holiness, there would be no wars in the world.”

“It is so, there would be none. However, I am a realist. Asking Halkeginia’s people to have as strong belief as Romalians would be a foolish demand to make, we know that well.”

“It is as his Holiness said – true faith sank to the ground because of the nature of the world.”

For a moment, the Pope closed his eyes to her words… and then looked up.

“This country is a very beautiful one. The colors that decorate the kingdom in spring, rich forests, gorgeous rivers, suiting the name of the Water Country… Romalia is poor in water. It makes one envious. And when such a beautiful country is involved in a war, I take it as blasphemy to God.”

“I think that it is my mission to defend the peace.”

Said Henrietta. It was slightly disappointing that the Pope of Romalia really had come for simple sightseeing and preaching about pacifism.

Taking a look at the clock on the wall, Henrietta tried to stand up.

“Well then, the room and the servants are prepared. Please stay here as long as you wish. In case you’ll want to explore the place, we’ll give you our guards.”

However, St. Aegis 32nd didn’t stand up.

“Your Holiness?”

“I came today to help Henrietta-dono accomplish her mission.”

St. Aegis the 32nd and Henrietta went to the royal courtyard. The courtyard of the palace was bathed with rays of springtime sunlight, and though its magnificence was not as great as Gallia's Palace of Lutèce, the flowerbeds were filled with various flowers in full bloom.

While walking through the path between the flowerbeds, St. Aegis the 32nd kept his silence.

“What did you want to show me?”

Breaking the silence, Henrietta asked. St. Aegis the 32nd noticed something in the corner of a flowerbed and squatted down.

“Please look here.”

There were ants.

"Aren't those ants?”

“Black ants, red ants – fighting for food.”

Indeed, small group of insects - the red and black ants - were fighting. The two kinds of ants were desperately competing against each other.

“Strife exists even between small creatures.”

St. Aegis the 32nd placed a hand between the insects, putting a barrier between the opposing parties of black and red ants.

Eventually the fight between the two groups ended, and both returned to their nests.

“Splendid arbitration.”

“The ants will not be able to understand that they have been arbitrated. It’s because my existence is bigger than they can perceive. A human has full power over the ants. If I wanted to, I could destroy the ant nest. Of course, I do not intend to do such a thing.”

“What do you want to say?”

“In short - power. For the preservation of peace, a huge power is necessary. A huge power that could arbitrate the two warring factions…”

“Where to get such power…”

As Henrietta started to say so, her eyes grew wider upon realization.

“That’s right. Henrietta-dono also knows about the legendary power…”

“I cannot understand, what do you mean?”

Henrietta tried to play dumb. But St. Aegis the 32nd continued to speak.

“The power given to us by God. The power that like water, has no color. A person’s mind can make it either white or black.”

“Your Holiness, ooh, Your Holiness…”

Henrietta shook her head.

“Do you know the Founder's element?”

“The Void.”

“Yes. Great Founder Brimir himself divided this powerful power into four – it was entrusted to the treasures and the rings. The Ruby of Water and the Founder’s Prayer Book are what Tristain got.”

“Correct.”

“Again, the people who should bear this power were also divided into four. Perhaps from the fear that the power would concentrate in one person's hands.”

Henrietta recalled Louise. And the ones similar to Louise - the supporter of Gallia, who had not revealed his true colors still. And the elf girl who lived quietly in Albion and whom she hadn't met…

Was she alright?

She has Albion's royal treasure, so she must be my cousin… Though we left her alone because she was happy living on her own… will she really be alright?

Thinking like this, Henrietta tried to focus back on the conversation.

"The Founder said it himself – 'Four treasures, four rings, four familiars and four users – when all four of them are gathered in a single place, my Void will awake.'"

"What a frightening power."

"Frightening you say? It is power given by God. It depends on the person whether it becomes white or black."

"Power makes one corrupt. I learned it from my mother. I, myself, think so as well. If possible, I would like to leave it alone."

"For how many years have we been involved in these useless fights?"

Henrietta was at a loss for words. She had to agree that the history of Halkeginia was a history of conflicts.

St. Aegis the 32nd took out something from his pocket. It was a colorful candy.

And threw it at the ants.

All the ants became crazy about the sudden blessing. They clung to the big candy. And they were not fighting against each other. Because there was plenty for them all, there was no need to fight.

"Together with the power, a common destination is needed. We already have it."

"Destination?"

"Something like this candy, do you understand?"

“I don’t.”

“The Holy Land.”

St. Aegis the 32nd said.

“…the Holy Land.”

It was Founder Brimir’s promised land guarded by elves. Though all kingdoms of Halkeginia united many times and aimed to recapture the land, it never ended in success…

“The Holy Land that is not free. That’s where we should aim our minds at. Without this aim there would be no true peace.”

“But… elves are strong…”

“They practice Ancient Magic. It is so. The Kings of Halkeginia have been defeated many times. However, they did not have the ‘Founder’s Void.’”

“…yet another war? This time with elves? But that’s not what you said before?! You said you wanted it to end!”

“The existence of such strong power would likely be enough to occupy the wise elves. You do not need to actually ‘use’ it, but rather to ‘show’ that you have it.”

St. Aegis the 32nd gave Henrietta an intense look. In those eyes there was not even a slight shadow of doubt in oneself. However, such absolute confidence in oneself could only be in a clergyman’s eyes.

“…is this what you wanted to show me?”

“Indeed. We can have a peaceful ‘negotiation’ with the elves. For that we need a great power… in other words, the Founder’s power is necessary.”

Henrietta felt herself attracted to the young Pope’s way of thinking. Without a doubt, it was realistic… and it sought for an ideal to pursue. But ideals and reality were two conflicting matters and innumerable sufferings could be created when trying to combine them both.

That was the attitude she had right now.

But, she could not take a step forward.

She did not have the courage.

Seeing Henrietta like this, the pope smiled.

He smiled like a boy.

A boy who before growing up had grand ideals. These ideals, with the coming of age, are usually swallowed up by reality.

However this pope, looked… like a boy in adult's body.

“Your Holiness's words are too grand… I cannot judge their correctness at the moment. Can I ask for some time for consideration?”

“The thing that Henrietta-dono says is very understandable. However, there cannot be a long delay.”

“Delay for?”

“Gallia. Sadly, it is a country ruled by a man who has no faith. People’s happiness is dominated by his personal desires. Henrietta-dono, we need to ally our ideals together.”

In her mind, Henrietta recalled Joseph, King of Gallia. His attitude to take over the other nations in the conference. An ambitious person, who persecuted Louise on a number of occasions. The tyrant who killed the true king, his younger brother - the Duke of Orleans, a cruel man who harmed his own niece Tabitha repeatedly…

“You saw how his mind works? If he was given the power of Void, we would not survive.”

“Yes.”

Henrietta nodded. Really, she could do nothing but agree.

“As a Pope, a servant of the god and of all people of Halkeginia, I order you -

take the ‘Void’ from that place, we cannot leave the amulet in the hands of a person who has no faith.”

Agnes quietly watched the queen and the pope's discussion in the courtyard. There were a lot of musketeers in the surroundings, guarding the place from a distance.

Once the discussion was over, Henrietta called Agnes with the small gesture.

Agnes kneeled down on one knee when facing the queen.

“Commander-dono, His Holiness, the Pope needs rest. Please guide him to his room.”

“As you wish.”

Standing up, Agnes turned towards the Pope.

“Your Holiness, please follow me.”

“Thank you very much for your efforts.”

Once looking up at St. Aegis the 32nd’s face, Agnes lost her tongue. Gone was her usual calm soldier mask, replaced by a pair of wide, glistening eyes.

“Is something the matter?”

Hearing the Pope’s gentle words, Agnes lowered her head in panic.

“F-Forgive my rudeness.”

Agnes, feeling like her heart was torn… started to walk. For a moment, she was reminded of her past, 20 years ago.

Chapter Eight: Jörmungand

“Louise, class started.”

Saito tried to wake Louise up. However, she tugged back on the blanket and did not come out of the bed.

“Get up.”

Saito pulled the blanket, but she pulled it back with force. It looked like Louise had no intentions of getting out of the bed. Siesta, who watched that sort of scene, primly poked Saito's shoulder.

“Hm?”

Then Siesta clung to Saito and shouted.

“Such a thing! Saito-san! Doing such a thing so early in the morning!”

Still, Louise didn’t get up from the bed. She seemed to be considerably depressed.

“Hey Louise… You are really depressed...”

Siesta abruptly parted from Saito and said with a polite cough.

“Saito-san, what did you do to make Miss Vallière so depressed?”

“Huh? I didn’t do anything.”

“Liar. Then, why is Miss Vallière depressed so much? What did you do to that girl?”

“Hey, she was just teaching me how to read.”

“Are you really sure it's just that?”

“Of course! Why shouldn't be it be just that? Louise is depressed about her magic not working. Hey, Louise, stop sulking this instant.”

Saito rocked Louise.

“Saito-san.”

“Hm?”

“That small girl… Indeed, it must really be your fetish. My mother said – when a man loves small girls more than needed, he will perpetrate in the future.”

“You see…”

“But, if Saito-san has to perpetrate then… I…”

Siesta’s face turned crimson, putting more fuss into Saito’s brains.

“Anyway, we need to wake Louise up… Hey Siesta, hold this.”

Saito and Siesta held the edges of the blanket and pulled. Clinging to the blanket, Louise rolled with it to the floor. She looked strange wearing a long dress along with her singlet. That was because the night was chilly, so Siesta put it on her.

“Oi, Louise. Morning.”

“Funya.”

Though Saito patted her cheek, Louise stayed almost unresponsive. All she did – was look at the ceiling absent-mindedly.

“Uwaa, she really looks like an empty doll.”

Siesta poked Louise.

“Funya.”

“Miss Vallière, wake up.”

“Funya. Funya, funya.”

“Wa, this is really amusing.”

Siesta poked all over Louise. But Louise remained still.

“Come on… Hey Louise, everyone feels sad once in a while. But this is too depressing.”

Then, Louise’s mouth was opened with a lot of effort. And said in an empty voice.

“Useless. I cannot use ‘Void’ at all. Even the ‘explosion’ is not working no matter what I recite. That’s how it is now.”

“It’s just a bad mood.”

However, Saito's attempts to comfort Louise did not reach her, who was lying on the floor.

“What to do… Only because of ‘Void’ was I of any use… Without it I am back to being Louise the Zero again…”

“It’s just back to the start, alright?”

However Louise responded no more. She just stared absent-mindedly into space.

“Derf.”

Saito decided to ask the sword. Recently Derflinger was neglected on numerous occasions, so he answered in a foul mood.

“What is it? So you call me out when you need an advice, huh. And you pull me out when you need to cut, huh. What if I am tired?”

“Listen up. Louise cannot use ‘Void’ anymore, can you tell us something about it?”

“Well I guess it’s because her willpower is down.”

“Really? Is that all? Then all she needs is just to rest?”

“No, because it’s 'Void' the matter is not that simple. With usual elements you need to rest a number of days to recover…’Void,’ though, its unclear how it gets accumulated and up till now it was used a lot. Remember that big explosion Louise cast?”

“Ah, you mean the one that destroyed that huge battleship?”

“That one; it consumed a lot of her willpower that she was storing up till then. Therefore, she could shoot such a big thing. Since then the remaining willpower has been consumed little by little. She hasn't been able to cast anything as big, right?”

It was as he said. There were no such huge light balls anymore.

“Then, she only needs to restore some of it again.”

“But how long will it take to cast ‘Void’ again? One year, two years…or maybe a whole decade…”

“Then we’ll be very patient.”

“She may not be able to cast it with such power again.”

Saito looked at Louise. She was lying spread on the floor, her eyes puffy from crying.

It hurt Saito to see Louise like this.

“Hey Louise, give it a break. You already worked hard enough. Even God-sama said to take a rest in a while.”

“…that’s impossible.”

“What?”

“I can’t settle down while knowing there is someone scheming something bad. Besides I still need to find a way to return you home. There are still many things left unfinished. Yet… I am useless like this…”

Louise began to cry again. Siesta tried to comfort Louise.

“That… Miss Vallière is not useless. You are pretty. And you have a power to comfort anyone. Hey, stop crying.”

However, Louise did not stop crying. With Louise being so sad, even Siesta started to weep.

Now then, what to do, he started to worry…

“Saitooooooooo! An order came! All Knights of the Undine Corps are commanded by Her Majesty!”

Guiche jumped in.

“Commanded?”

“That’s right! We, The Knight Corps of the Undine and Louise, were given a direct command. Aah I'm so glad! Though we were not punished, I was still nervous thinking that Her Majesty might still be displeased!”

“You were nervous? You were just fooling around!”

“Don’t say such mean things. Though I had a laughing face on the outside, I was not calm inside. Anyways, my worries were just imaginary tears. Her Majesty’s trust in us is still unshaken!”

“Tsk, so what about princess-sama?

“Anyways, we need to come to the castle. Aah, lets go. We cannot attend lessons now!”

Guiche trembled with joy.

Saito really did not want to trouble Louise at such time. However… because they passed the border without permission, refusing to go now, may cause some tension between them and Henrietta.

Saito quickly got ready. However, he only carried Derflinger on his back.

“What about the others?”

“For the time being - only you, me and Louise were asked to come.”

“Louise can’t.”

“Eh? Why?”

“I’ll go.”

Louise stood up abruptly.

“Don’t over do it. Your condition is bad right now.”

“Bad or good – it is of no importance.”

“What, what is wrong?”

Guiche with a surprised expression stared at the couple.

“No, this fellow? Right now, her magic… ouch!”

Louise suddenly kicked Saito between his legs, making him faint in agony.

“…you talk too much. If it is something concerning Her Majesty - I will go no matter what.”

At that time, an owl flew in from the window.

“Ara. Tourukas? What’s the matter?”

Saito recalled this name. *Where have I heard it before?* – he wondered, while the owl passed Louise an envelope.

“Letter to the Louise-sama.”

“Letter?”

Louise began to read the letter. For a moment, her face lightened up… and then became cloudy again.

And then paled.

“What’s wrong? From whom is the letter?”

There was no answer. Louise folded the letter, placed it into her pocket, and staggered towards the closet to change her clothes.

“Oi, are you really alright?”

In the academy's stable, Saito asked Louise while putting a saddle on his horse, but she didn’t answer. Pressing her lips into a thin line, she silently straddled the horse.

Well, it will probably be an easy mission, so it’s alright. While he thought so, passing the school’s gates, Sylphid flew down from the sky and landed in front of everyone.

“What the? You!”

He saw Tabitha and Kirche on top of it.

“I’ll go too.”

Surprisingly, the one who opened the mouth was not Kirche but Tabitha.

“This child, after she saw you out of the window, she dashed outside in an instant.”

Kirche said whilst spreading her arms wide open.

“Y-You? Why?”

Saito asked in surprise after a short pause. The previous night as well, she was really eager to help him to learn the Halkeginian written language.

“Silly question. That’s because you helped me.”

“It wasn’t just me who helped you.”

Saito said.

“Surely, you must be special.”

Kirche said while laughing.

“Louise, it’s not like that.”

Saito called out to Louise, fearing unforeseen retribution from her.

However Louise was still looking detached. She just straddled the horse and rode forward alone.

“Oi, Louise. There’s no need to ride a horse. Sylphid could carry us.”

Even though Saito called her, Louise just urged the horse with the riding crop.

“What are you-“

A little while ago, after reading the letter, she started to act strange. No, she has been acting strange for a while already - Saito thought, while he, together with Guiche, perched on Sylphid’s back.

Sylphid flapped her mighty wings and lifted herself up into the sky.

Seeing them before her, Louise bent forward and hastily urged the horse to sprint faster.

Ignoring that, Saito asked Sylphid.

“Sylphid, pull her in as well.”

“Kyuikyui.”

Sylphid made joyful sounds, and landed down before Louise and the horse. Seeing the dragon appear, the horse stopped in its tracks and neighed in fear.

Sylphid dexterously extended her long tongue, and carefully pulled Louise from the saddle and threw her over the back.

With a loud ‘huff’ Saito caught Louise in his arms.

Despite being treated so harshly, Louise did not complain, only her shoulders

trembled slightly.

“Hm? What’s wrong with this child?”

What was written in that letter?

Saito felt uneasy.

Was it something concerning the "Void?" Saito suddenly remembered where he heard of that owl before.

It was Louise’s family’s owl! He recalled - once, this Tourukas flew through Cattleya’s carriage window and landed on Saito’s head.

Someone from that strict family of Louise's must have asked something of her – Saito concluded. The letter must have surely been concerning the willpower, and for Louise, who had just lost her ability to use "Void," it felt like a final blow.

Talking to her right now won’t do any good – Saito thought, gently holding her.

After waiting impatiently for the group to arrive to the royal palace, Henrietta seemed to be very worried. The queen looked at every one of The Knight Corps of the Water Spirit. The Undine knight squad that Saito was an assistant commander of.

“Welcome. There’s something I have to ask from you.”

“What are your orders, your majesty?”

Guiche kneeled on one knee, while Henrietta spoke of her request.

“I want you to bring here the ‘Void’ user from Albion.”

“Tiffania?”

Saito asked surprised and Henrietta nodded.

“…it is not good to have a ‘Void’ user living all alone like that. Besides she has

Albion’s royal family’s keepsake, so she must be my cousin. I cannot overlook that. When sooner or later Gallia expands, she could be attacked by that demon just like you, Louise.”

“She is not alone. She lives with orphans. Tiffania is acting in their mother’s place.”

“Then please bring those orphans too. Let’s secure their lives.”

“…I see. If you are worried to this extent, then we will bring them.”

“Thank you. This is my wish.”

Henrietta said, placing her elbows on the chair and taking a deep sigh. Seeing her like this, Saito wondered.

“Is there something troubling you?”

“I will tell you sooner or later. For now, just hurry up and go.”

“Ship preparations will take time…”

Then, the small figure of Tabitha behind them uttered silently.

“Sylphid.”

“Indeed. Because it is a wind dragon it is faster than a ship.”

Guiche nodded.

Henrietta noticed Tabitha and took her hand.

“Princess of Gallia. I wish to express my gratitude for your cooperation. Sooner or later we will need to discuss about you and future plans.”

Tabitha gave a small nod.

“For your return, let's prepare the ship of Rosais. Anyway, the sooner we leave for Albion the better.”

Henrietta, who seemed to be heavily worried, informed the party cordially. Saito

looked from Henrietta to Louise. It was unusual that these two friends hadn't talked. It must have been because they both had their own worries. The separate problems occupied both their minds completely.

Saito had uneasy feeling. What on earth was happening?

San Marin – town of Gallia, situated at the sea.

Here was the base of Gallia's navy, similar to every Halkeginian air base, various buildings were built in there. Iron towers, including pier ships, and the brick houses stood in rows.

There was one building in the corner of this urban area.

A building, built with lumber and sail cloth on a foundation of stone and mortar, which looked like a fallen cylindrical column.

The guards were placed in the surroundings to keep the citizens from coming close to the outskirts.

One huge ship approached the iron tower built in front of that building.

The soldiers in the sentry, looked up at the ship.

"Ha, isn't that Charles Orléans?"

"Unusually huge ship."

This was a Gallia's royal family's warship named after the crown prince who had died three years before. 150 mails in total length, after the Lexington of the Albion's air force sank, it was the largest warship in Halkeginia.

Seeing the royal family flag flapping on the mast, the guard was speechless.

"Hey, look at the flag. The king is on its deck."

"True. Is it some kind of inspection?"

The guard said absentmindedly, narrowing his eyes.

“Could this be about the ‘experimentation building?’”

“What?”

“Don’t you know? A lot of suspicious folks were loitering around lately. Finally, even king-sama arrived. Between you and me, they say that even an elf was seen.”

Lowering his voice his fellow whispered.

“Elf? It must be a lie. Some sort of drunkards’ deliriums surely.”

“No no, it seems to be true. It had an unusually clear face. And in the middle of the night they say that it, together with the followers, went to the ‘experimentation building.’ It is said that a pair of sharp ears were seen peeking from the hat edges too.”

His mate trembled.

“Don’t be afraid.”

The ship moored to the iron tower, and the gathered orchestra began to play, greeting the king. Soldiers in formal uniforms lined up left and right alongside the stone path from the iron tower, saluting with their wands.

The gangway came down from the ship and a vivid blue haired hero-like figure appeared.

“What does the ‘incapable king’ want from such a place as this?”

“But…”

His mate turned around and looked up at the huge "experimentation building" and whispered.

“Just between us, but what the heck is this thing anyway?”

The temperature made Mrs. Molière, who entered the "experimental building," lift her eyebrows. It felt like a steam bath inside.

“It’s hot.”

The mistress dizzily looked up. However, the king didn’t really seem to mind the heat. The man in scholar clothes beside them explained.

“I'm terribly sorry for the heat. To prevent air and sound from leaking out, the whole building is covered by sail cloth. The air inside is already extremely hot after being heated by the spring sun. There is also numerous furnaces within the building, so this heat is unavoidable.”

“What did you want me to see then?”

Mrs. Molière sulkily asked. A lot of suspicious jars and pans were queued up and used for difficult magical researching. Large blast-furnaces were melting the bright red steel producing incredible heat.

There were a lot of men in researcher's clothing coming, giving some work instructions to busy workers, and then leaving. Every worker was told beforehand about Joseph’s visit so they were trying to not pay attention.

One section they passed had large anvils lined up. Blacksmiths surrounding them were forging a ten mail length steel plate. A large number of such plates were already piled up nearby.

“What are you making such big steel plates for?”

When Mrs. Molière asked, Joseph shook his head and answered.

“For armor.”

“Mo! Who would wear such huge armor?!”

However, Joseph didn't answer.

Finally, after some time, they arrived to the central and very spacious portion of

the building. Seats reserved for special guests were installed there - Joseph's henchmen were already awaiting his arrival.

“We waited for your command, Joseph-sama.”

It was a slim woman whose face was hidden under a deep hood, and after her words, she bowed reverently. Mrs. Molière, saw this figure a few times in the palace. The mistress felt something cold in that woman, and quietly drew closer to Joseph.

“Aah Myoz! Myoz!”

However, Joseph ran up to the hooded woman and embraced her strongly. The edges of the hooded woman’s, called Myoz, lips curved up. Mrs. Molière puckered up her brows.

“Once I heard that one item was completed, I flew here in an instant.”

“It was only possible due to the cooperation of Lord Bidashal.”

A man standing next to Myoz slightly bent his skinny body, paying his devoirs to Joseph.

Because of the big hat he wore, one could not see his face. Only a small mouth slightly peeped out.

“Oh Bidashal! You did great! You helped a lot in the difficult making of ‘Jörmungand’!”

“I fulfilled my part of the agreement.”

Bidashal said in non-chalant voice.

To these words Mrs. Molière’s eyebrows arched even higher up. Such words were unsuited talking to the king, but Joseph didn’t seem to mind that.

“What? You are talking about ‘Jörmungand’s’ completion as if it was a failure!”

“But Your Majesty, all that matters is your niece who is still in Tristain’s hands - I do not care about any other internal affairs.”

“That Tristainian lass? I’ll use my measures to get her. Leave.”

Joseph was already crazy about the new toy.

Mrs. Molière took an interest into this "Jörmungand" that made the king so obsessed.

“Your Majesty, could you tell me what is that ‘Jörmungand?’”

“Remember that knight doll you once gave me?”

“The knight doll?”

Mrs. Molière was taken away by the shock. Did the king use such an enormous building just to make himself a new toy doll?

Since he is the king, I guess that would not matter much – Mrs. Molière thought. In that artificial miniature garden, Joseph was amusing himself with war all day long.

“Behold.”

Joseph sat on the prepared chair. Mrs. Molière sat next to him.

There was a wide spacious place before them. Its circular shape made it look like a coliseum.

“What will happen, some kind of show will start?”

“The entertainment. The entertainment! Indeed, a joyful entertainment will start now!”

Joseph, watched the coliseum with a boy-like fascination.

While Mrs. Molière was waiting quietly as well… the hedge on the west side opened, and with loud, earth-shattering sounds, a ten mails high, huge golem appeared.

“It’s just an earth golem.”

Mrs. Molière said in a disappointed voice, watching the scene. Indeed, though it

was a splendid Golem, it was still the usual earth golem.

One after another three earth golems appeared.

One golem picked up the cannon placed in the corner of coliseum. The he prepared the cannon – packed the gunpowder and loaded a shell. Such a move took Mrs. Molière's breath away. Even while walking normally a golem could do a lot of destruction.

And for such a huge golem - these movements were unusually dexterous.

"The elite knights of the West Parterre - square-class earth golems."

Myoz explained.

Indeed, square-class…

"Umm, is that golem a 'Jörmungand?'"

However, Joseph did not answer.

Then…

The edge of Joseph's lip lifted up, and his face became like a birds of prey.

The hedge on the east side opened, and another huge golem appeared.

Mrs. Molière's eyes opened wide. A tiny gasp escaped her lips.

The 'thing' that appeared was not only enormous, but also carried an ominous atmosphere around it.

"W-What is that...?"

It was a 25 mails tall giant, and like a person wearing a robe, its body was wrapped up in a sail. He was at the size of ceilings. However, his movements were totally different from the ones usually associated with golems.

The giant took one step.

Zam! – earth trembled, and the chair on which Mrs. Molière sat, shook.

However, apart from the loud sound, it walked gracefully like a true human.

“T-This golem can really walk so smoothly…”

Mrs. Molière wondered.

“Walking smoothly is not the only thing it can do.”

Not able to contain the joy, Joseph said in awe.

Three golems, bending slightly, moved towards the newly appeared "Jörmungand."

Two golems moved to right and left.

In quickness that did not suit such gigantic bodies, the golems raised their fists.

Thud!

A big cloud of dust lifted and Mrs. Molière instinctively shut her eyes.

The two golems’ fists heavily planted against the left and right sides of Jörmungand’s face.

When she squeezed her eyes open… she saw a surprising spectacle.

Jörmungand was holding the fists of the right and left earth golems tightly in his grasp.

“What a power…”

After leaving such a strong impression, the spectacle before Mrs. Molière’s eyes continued to unfold even further.

Jörmungand, pulled the two golems, and crushed them into each other.

A monstrous cloud of dust flew up, forcing Mrs. Molière into a violent coughing fit.

The two golems were completely mashed against each other, and now only one big pile of dirt remained.

The last earth golem aimed the cannon at Jörmungand. Mrs. Molière instinctively shouted.

“Stop! If it shoots the cannon, Jörmungand will crumble! It’s dangerous!”

Mrs. Molière’s shout did not reach anyone - the golem lit the match cord and fired the cannon. The roaring sound was deafening; a severe firing line burned the eyes, and the jet-black smoke filled the place.

The roof sailcloth flapped loudly.

Mrs. Molière closed her eyes again.

Now its turned into rubble for sure.… she thought slowly opening her eyes again, but Jörmungand was still standing there.

The improvised robe of sailcloth was completely torn by the cannon shell, and Jörmungand's surface was visible.

It was the shining steel that met Mrs. Molière’s eyes.

“The armor… Just how thick is this armor...?”

Though he wore such armor, Jörmungand plunged forward in a speed of blitz. Hit by the Jörmungand's tackle, the earth golem shattered in an instant.

Witnessing such an unbelievable spectacle with her own two eyes, Mrs. Molière was completely at a loss of words.

After a moment of silence, Mrs. Molière finally worked the words out of her throat, barely able to think.

“Your Majesty… what kind of monster have you created?”

“Ancient and legendary – when those two elements combine, they create a miracle.”

“…ten of such monsters would be enough to conquer Halkeginia.”

“Ten? Much more than that – we’ll create a whole knight unit of Jörmungands.”

Mrs. Molière suddenly recalled the huge steel plates she saw before, and her eyes widened.

Not being able to grasp the spectacle and Joseph's words together, she fainted.

"Did you like it?"

Myoz… Myoznitnirn approached Joseph and kneeled down on one knee.

"Of course. Turned very well. This knight doll…"

"Real value cannot be measured until it's used in the actual combat."

"We already have perfectly fitting guys for that."

Joseph smiled.

"My brother. We will capture my niece easily… with this Jörmungand…"

Chapter Nine: Reunion in Westwood

“I-Is that the village where the half-elf with an unnaturally big chest lives?”

Guiche asked anxiously.

“What the heck are you talking about?”

“Didn’t you say that? It's how you described the half-elf girl — long ears and a ‘ridiculous chest.’”

“You seem to have had quite the sneaky conversation behind our backs.”

Kirche teased, grinning.

“B-Because it’s what he wanted to know the most about!”

“Don’t blame it all on me!”

“But are that girl’s breasts really that big? Bigger than mine?”

Kirche puffed out her chest.

“D-Dunno.”

Saito replied, feeling awkward.

It was already evening when the party reached Westwood Village. Due to the position of the moons, Albion was considerably closer to Tristain than usual, but it still took half a day with Sylphid flying at full speed to get there.

Compared to the other time when they went to Gallia, the party was in a completely different mood. This time they had the duty of returning with Tiffania.

The only hurdle was convincing Tiffania the best they could. It wasn't dangerous, so the party was cheerful.

It may not be a trouble-free duty though, Saito thought.

After all, Louise can't use Void now.

Speaking of which, Louise was the only one who was not in a good mood, and remained silent most of the time.

Kirche poked Saito.

"Hey, Saito. What did you do to Louise? She's been acting weird since morning. Always silent…"

"No… to tell the truth…"

After a moment of hesitation, whether to say or not to say, Saito told Kirche about it.

"Oh my! Willpower!"

"Shh! Not so loud!"

Saito lowered his voice so that Louise, who was walking ahead of them, would not hear.

"Ara~, so she returned to being Louise the Zero again? However, even if she hides it, it may be a serious disease."

"Don't say that. You'll just make me more worried."

"But, maybe it's for the better?"

Kirche said with a serious expression on her face.

"What?"

"This child always had to carry the burden of 'legend' on her shoulders. I would be happy to pass it to someone else."

It may be so, Saito thought.

Saito threw a nostalgic look at the village in front of him. Westwood Village had hardly changed.

Built deep in the forest, the plain, compact houses were hard to notice.

Once entering the place, they immediately headed towards Tiffania’s house. White smoke was rising from thatched roof.

“Oi, you’ll just come in like that?”

“Yep, it’s an easy mission anyway. Compared to the usual hardships, it’ll be child’s play.”

Guiche said while humming.

“Mo, really, you should be the last man to relax.”

“Says who? Wasn’t it you who was acting strange lately?”

“Me?”

“Indeed. Though I understand your enthusiasm about becoming sub-commander and all, somehow it’s still strange, normally you wouldn’t be so uptight. It doesn’t feel like the old you at all.”

“Really?”

“Aah, before you lived more comfortably. More at ease! Ahaha!”

Guiche laughed aloud.

“Indeed, when you don’t let your guard down like this, it’s no good.”

Kirche said.

“I command! Demon or not! Come out of this house this instant!”

Guiche stepped in front of Tiffania’s house and shouted.

“I speak in the name of whole clan! I, Guiche de Gramont, Commander of The Knight Corps of the Water Spirit! In the name of Her Majesty! This is a royal order!”

When there was no answer, Guiche opened the door.

Momentarily, his body stiffened.

“What? What’s wrong? Is she changing her clothes inside?” Amused, Kirche wondered and peeked inside.

Her body stiffened as well.

Saito and Tabitha looked at each other. After nodding to each other, they both at the same time pushed their heads through the doorway...

Behind the door, in the living room at the table where Saito also used to eat, two people were sitting.

One of them was Tiffania, who stared at the party with blank surprise written all over her face.

However, their nostalgic friend Tiffania was not the only one in the room. And the main problem was that other one.

Tabitha, who poked her head out of the doorway, stated.

“Fouquet.”

Indeed, Tiffania’s house guest was none other but the enemy, Fouquet. Saito’s shoulders began to tremble. He recalled the face of Wales, who met his death on the ground of Albion.

This was the woman who cooperated with the Crown Prince’s murderer, Wardes.

The thief Fouquet the Crumbling Dirt.

He recalled Henrietta’s crying face, the burnt village of Tarbes and a lot of other spectacles during that miserable Albion’s campaign.

“Fouqueeeeeeeeeet!”

Saito screamed pulling the sword from his back and leaping forwards.

The rune on his left hand shone.

His swing cut the air within a hair of Fouquet’s face. However, she was a person of no common order. Standing up without fear of the leaping Saito, she pulled out the wand and blocked the sword.

For a moment their weapons crossed before both of them jumped back and took the attacking positions.

“What are you doing here?”

“That should be my line.”

The two simultaneously stared intensely into each others’ eyes, adjusting the timing. Then…

“Stop!”

Tiffania jumped in between them.

“Why are you two fighting?! Saito! Put your sword away!”

“B-But…”

“Mathilda nee-san! Do not raise your hand against this person!”

“Mathilda nee-san?”

Saito watched Fouquet. Wrong person? Though he thought so, those sharp eyes on her strong face, he really fought against her Golem before — no doubt, it was Fouquet the Crumbling Dirt.

Fouquet, wondering what was happening, watched while switching between Saito’s and Tiffania’s faces.

After that, she shook her head.

“It can’t be helped.”

Saito though, still blinded with anger, tried to plunge forward… but Tiffania clung to his arm.

“Please, Saito. Stop... Though I don’t know what happened between you, stop fighting. Please…”

Tiffania was crying.

“Damn,” Saito silently cursed under his nose, but put the sword back into its sheath again. And then with a plop, he sat down on the floor.

”Thank you.”

Tiffania showed an expression of gratitude while sobbing.

Guiche, Kirche and Tabitha looked at each other.

“Maybe now, after such a very long time, we should renew old friendships again?”

Fouquet asked in a tired voice.

Although Fouquet and the party continued to stare at each other for a while… feeling her legs getting numb, she sat on a chair.

“You too, put your wands away and sit down. Aren’t you tired after a long journey?”

The group looked at each other deciding what to do, but when Kirche sat down sighing "Oh well," they reluctantly followed her lead.

“Hey, Tiffania, speak up, why you are acquainted with this fellow?”

Tiffania looked at Saito as if asking, "Is it ok?" — Saito nodded. Under the circumstances, they could do nothing but explain.

Thus Tiffania explained it all to Fouquet.

How Albion’s army was held off and how she helped Saito who was about to die.

How she became acquainted to Louise and others…

“Aah, so it was you then? The one who pushed back the 70,000 Albion troops single-handedly.”

Saito nodded.

“Fufu, you did so, didn’t you. You seem to have grown up a little.”

Fouquet laughed.

“Now then, it’s our turn next. How come you and Tiffania know each other?”

Instead of Fouquet, Tiffania answered Saito.

“I told you some time ago… My father… the archduke, was responsible for the royal treasury, and there was a viceroy serving in this area.”

“Ahh.”

“She’s his daughter. In fact, she’s also my life savior.”

“What?!”

Saito was surprised.

“It’s not that bad. Mathilda-nee-san was sending us the money for our living expenses.”

Though Saito tried to say something, he was interrupted by Fouquet.

“Nuh-oh. Don’t talk about my former job. Let’s keep some secrets here.”

“Saito, do you know what Mathilda-nee-san was doing?”

Tiffania asked while leaning forward.

“N? Ah, aah…”

“Teaching! Don’t say anything else!”

Fouquet gave Saito a piercing glare.

“If you talk — I’ll kill you.”

Saito reluctantly decided to lie. He felt sorry for Tiffania if she were to know Fouquet’s true character.

“…that—treasure hunting.”

“Treasure hunting? That’s great!”

"Fu" — Kirche pressed her hand against her mouth

“Don’t laugh.”

“What about you, Auntie? How did your La Rochelle visit end?”

To Kirche's provocation, Fouquet forced a wry smile.

“Oh, that adventure. Well, those guys ended up grasping all treasures to themselves.”

Relieved, Tiffania said,

“Therefore, no hard feelings. Not anymore. Make up. Hey, lets have a toast!”

Tiffania took out wine and glasses from the cupboard.

Thus a strange party of bitter enemies started.

Everyone continued to drink wine in silence as there wasn't really any conversation. Only Guiche was cheerful while all others were only adding, "Uh-huh, yeah." Kirche from time to time put her hand on her cleavage where she had her wand hidden, before pulling it back again. Louise was absent-minded as usual.

The person who hurt Henrietta badly was there, in person, right in front of them.

Saito chewed his lip while watching Fouquet.

Aah, how many times he dreamed of an encounter like this eye to eye.

When thinking so, he had the impulse to plunge forward now and then.

Silently drinking the wine, Fouquet soothingly asked Saito,

“So, what's the reason you're here? I doubt you're here just to drop by.”

Saito, looking back and forth between Tiffania and Fouquet… answered after some hesitation.

“…Tiffania, we came to bring you back.”

Fouquet's eyebrow twitched a little.

Tiffania surprised, was looking at Saito as well.

Saito leaned forward.

“Tiffania, come together with us to Tristain.”

Troubled, Tiffania hesitated.

“But…I…”

Saito desperately continued to persuade Tiffania.

“Of course, the children will go with you. In Tristain your lives will be secure. Didn’t you say you wanted to see the outside world?”

Tiffania’s face brightened up a little.

Then, Tiffania stole an embarrassed glance at Fouquet.

Saito stared at Fouquet as well.

She would probably say it was no good. She, who helped Tiffania for a long time, would not permit her to go together with Saito.

If so, then it’d be the sword’s turn again.

Saito slowly reached out for Derflinger.

Tension filled the room.

It was ready to blow anytime.

And then, after what felt like an eternity…

Fouquet closed her eyes and nodded.

“Good. Go with them, Tiffania.”

Surprise was clearly reflected on everybody’s faces.

“It’s time for you to see the outside world.”

“Oi! You agree!?”

“Uh-huh. Besides, I am broke now. Even if I wanted to send the remittance, I could no longer do so. That’s why I came to see you today. This is a nice opportunity.”

“Mathilda-nee-san…”

Tiffania’s face fell. Fouquet walked up to Tiffania and hugged her tightly.

“Such a silly child. Why are you crying?”

While scrubbing her eyes, Tiffania answered,

“Because you were having such a hard time. Why didn’t you say so sooner?”

“Are there parents who would want their daughter to feel anxious?”

“But Mathilda-nee-san is not my parent.”

“I feel like one. Because I have known you since you were so small.”

Later that night, after Tiffania cried herself to sleep… Fouquet started getting ready to leave.

“Oi, wait.”

Hastily Saito told Fouquet.

“What is it? Are you saying you still want to fight? What a troublesome child.”

“It's different. Don’t you want to say goodbye to Tiffania?”

Saito asked softly, but Fouquet shook her head.

“I’m in a hurry. I am very busy lately.”

Or is it that you simply hate goodbyes...

Not knowing what else to say, Saito silently watched Fouquet walk to the door. At the doorway, Fouquet turned around.

“That child is so naïve. She doesn't know about the world. Look after her so that she doesn't run into trouble.”

“Yeah.”

Saito nodded. Then Fouquet looked at everyone.

“Now then — next time we meet, we'll be enemies.”

“You're not an enemy now.”

“True.”

Fouquet suppressed laughter.

“See you then. Best of luck.”

But when Fouquet turned around, Saito asked her,

“Are you involved in some intrigues now as well?”

“I didn't ask you why you want to take that child with you. Therefore, you should not prompt either.”

“I want to know why. Are you not worried?”

Fouquet’s face looked lonely for a moment.

“That’s just the path I chose, I guess.”

Putting the deep hood on, Fouquet said,

“You're searching for your own way home. To see your parents’ faces again. I too, a long time ago, lost my place to return to.”

After Fouquet left, Saito and others decided to go to sleep.

Saito sat down on the sofa, but since he was not able to fall asleep he just stared at the moons.

Fouquet’s words were whirling in his head.

‘For the sake of returning home.’

Even if I wanted to return, I could not, Saito thought. *However, do I really want to return?* The idea of leaving this world was still very vague somehow, was it because he still hasn't decided?

As he was lost in a deep thought…

“Saito.”

Someone softly called out his name.

He looked up, and saw Louise walking up to him.

“Louise.”

He called.

She was silent for such a long time… What was the matter?

His hand abruptly reached out, and gently touched Louise’s cheek.

It was wet.

Louise cried.

Saito became flustered.

“Oi, what’s wrong?”

“Say...”

“Don’t cry.”

Because the room was dark… he could not read her expression. It made Saito feel anxious. Ignoring Saito’s words, Louise asked,

“Do you want to return?”

“…eh?”

“Do you want to return to your home place, tell me.”

“Why you are asking such a thing all of a sudden?”

“Answer me!”

Saito slowly… repeated the words he kept on saying recently,

“No, there are still things left unfinished in this world, I will return after that…”

“Liar.”

“I’m not lying.”

“Then why were you crying in front of Chii-nee-sama? If you did not want to return home, you wouldn't have cried.”

“That…”

Suddenly, he recalled. How he was held close to Cattleya’s chest… He remembered everything all of sudden. Mother’s warmth. His hometown…

“How do you know about that?”

“It was written in Chii-nee-sama’s letter.”

Louise showed Saito the letter that she received from the owl. After reading it, Louise started to act strange. It was a letter from Cattleya.

Saito pulled the lamp off the table and ignited it with flint. He held the letter under the light.

Because of his studies with Tabitha… the meanings of characters filled his mind.

In the letter, after the greetings and being happy about Louise’s homecoming… was written about Saito.

That thinking about home, Saito cried.

That she was worried about Saito.

That it was Louise’s duty to see Saito off, returning back home.

That this was what should be the highest priority above all…

Louise asked, her face was soaked with tears,

“Why don't you cry in front of me?”

“That’s…”

“Why do you never tell me how you really feel?”

Why...

Absent-mindedly, Saito was losing himself in far away musings.

Because I love Louise.

I don't want to show tears in front of the woman I love.

But… it wasn’t just that. It wasn’t just this feeling.

“Hey, why?”

Louise whispered, as her voice shivered a little.

“Because he's a familiar.”

“Tabitha."

Behind Louise stood the small girl with short blue hair.

Nonono — Louise shook her head as if trying to drive the unpleasant thoughts away. In a voice that sounded like she was trying to persuade herself, she said,

“Yes. I agree with what Tabitha said. Therefore, when you are close to me, the thoughts of returning home just don't enter your mind. No, you cannot think about it. Because when you stay by me, this world seems like the right one for you. No, that’s how it has to be.”

“Different. It’s different. That’s…”

It was hard to explain.

However, he was not very certain… it could be like Louise said. Or it could be his own feelings messing with his mind.

Whichever it was, he could not deny it.

Whether his thoughts were really his or not — Saito could not understand.

“It’s hard to know…”

“I, too, am uncertain.”

Tabitha added.

“Your tone was quick to become doubtful… Therefore it must be a fact.”

“Fact?”

“A familiar’s ‘memory’ is changed for the convenience of their master. Memory is used to store information. Like how you were quick to learn characters. Not thinking much about your hometown must be because of it as well.”

“Are you sure about that? After all, I did remember my home from time to time…”

“But how many of those times happened with Louise around?”

These words made Saito blink in surprise. There were several times when he recalled his home but kept quiet about it.

When he was looking at the meadow of Tarbes together with Siesta.

In Westwood Village when he heard Tiffania’s harp.

When he was hugged by Cattleya…

Seeing how Saito became silent, Tabitha continued to speak,

“‘Gandálfr's rune’ might have created a false motive in your mind, to stay in this world. For you, those fake feelings are true. ‘I want to do something for this world.’ But it could be that you are only made to feel that way, while your true feelings have disappeared.”

Surprised, Saito asked,

“Is it really possible?”

Tabitha indifferently continued her speech,

“As time passes, the effect grows stronger. Gradually, the familiar becomes accustomed so that he can become one in body and spirit with their master in the end.”

“Oi oi, if so, then I am not me…”

Saito remarked, to which Derflinger’s voice responded,

“Well, you finally understand what I was worrying about.”

Without them noticing, all of the group members had already woken up.

“Certainly, you have been acting weird lately. Somehow, you were strangely serious…”

Guiche said, his voice was filled with worry.

“Ara, I think it’s because you were reflecting your master.”

Kirche added.

Louise said, while rubbing her eyes.

“And ever since we met again, you were acting a little strange. You always woke up with a somehow strong sense of duty… it was so not like you.”

“But… still. Despite all the things that have been said, there is still no proof… Hmmm.”

“Saito, is…is it true?”

“Tiffania?”

The one who spoke was Tiffania, who had been sleeping soundly till then and came closer to Saito..

“Really… then I am not really me.”

Saito looked at everyone and said honestly. Louise turned to Tiffania.

“Hey, Tiffania. You can erase memory, right? Then can you erase that part as well? Can you erase the fake motive that Gandálfr's rune created in Saito’s mind so that he would stay in this world?”

“I don’t know…”

“It’s worth a try. The only thing that can interfere with ‘Void’ is another ‘Void’.”

“Oi oi, don’t decide for me!”

Saito shouted.

“Hey Saito…”

“What?”

Louise had a determined expression on her face. Saito knew, that once Louise was like that, nothing could change her mind.

“In your mind, two melodies are ringing. We have to find out which one is true. Such a duet cannot go on forever.”

In a shy voice, Derflinger noted,

“But young lass… when we erase that part, his feelings for you might change as well.”

“It’s alright.”

Louise said in a clear voice. Then, while wiping off tears, Louise declared with a fake bravado,

“Mo, it's annoying! Regardless, when a guy l-loves — it's nothing but inconvenience. He just acts s-suspiciously when night comes! I will be relieved once it’s over!”

“Louise… you…”

“Look, lets just finish the spell quickly and bring you back to the way you were before. And once you are back to your old self, we can search for the way for you to return.”

“Louise!”

Louise started to run… but then stopped and spoke while looking down, bangs covering her eyes,

“However, the way it is right now, I cannot help you. I am really nothing more than Louise the Zero…”

After saying that much, Louise ran out of the room.

Saito tried to run after her, but Guiche and Kirche stopped him, grabbing his

hands.

“Let go! Let me go!”

“Calm down, I consider myself to be your friend. That’s why I won’t do that.”

“I think the same way, too.”

They both, with unusually serious faces, nodded.

Naudiz Isaz Ehwaz…

The sounds of the Void’s runes reached Saito’s ears.

Hagalaz Yr Beorc…

“Tiffania…”

He looked at Tiffania, who had a serious expression while reciting the Void’s runes towards Saito.

Nyd Is Algiz Berkanan Man Laguz…

The spell was completed.

His consciousness fading… Saito collapsed on the floor.

Chapter Ten: The Heart of The Duet

“I’m home.”

Returning back home from school, Saito passed through the doorway of his house. He took off his school jacket and went straight to the living room to turn the television on.

It was an ordinary day.

While he was watching the television, the phone rang.

He picked up the telephone. It was his classmate.

Saito, have you seen the latest TV show?

“Why do you think I did?”

Someone who has as much free time as you ought to have.

A trivial conversation.

Life was trivial every day.

There was nothing that could replace this lovely everyday routine…

Saito decided to browse the internet, so he turned his notebook computer on.

“Hm?”

It didn’t turn on.

There was no power supply.

After trying a few times, Saito found his mother standing behind him. Her hair

was rather short and she seemed to have gained some weight lately.

“Mom, I’m hungry. Give me some food.”

“Not yet.”

“What? I want to drink some miso soup.”

For some reason he really wanted to taste it again.

His mother's miso soup.

Though it was nothing special and had a trivial taste, for Saito it felt like it would be the best meal ever.

“Saito.”

“What?”

“Haven’t you forgotten something?”

“What is it?”

“A thing that you should have done.”

“Homework?”

“Yes homework, but think about it... There is something else, isn’t there? The promise.”

“Promise?”

“Uh-huh. Haven’t you made an important promise to a friend?”

Promise? What promise would that be? Saito thought.

He could not recall it.

Hurry up, remember... and while trying to remember, Saito woke up.

On a bed.

Tabitha was sitting nearby, reading a book.

He knew the sight of that bed and of that room. It was Tiffania’s room inside a house in Westwood Village.

He had used to stay in there.

Saito squeezed his eyes shut as he was blinded by bright sunlight pouring through the window.

Somehow… he was feeling refreshed.

Though his head was still dizzy from the collapse, he felt free…

Noticing that Saito woke up, Tabitha closed her book.

“How?”

“Hm? I feel refreshed… I wonder if it’s the effect of Tiffania’s spell? It was enough to put me to sleep… I feel alright I guess. However, it feels a bit strange. As if something is gone.”

Tabitha nodded.

“Where is everyone?”

“They left for home earlier. They took that half-elf girl with them.”

“I see… what a heartless lot. Disregarding the person under a strange spell, and moreover — leaving him behind.”

Then Tabitha stood up and looked directly at Saito's face.

“Do you want anything?”

“To drink miso soup.”

Saito said with a sigh. It was a first thing that came to his mind.

“What is that?”

“Well, a dish in my world… I would like to eat soup.” Saito said, feeling a little embarrassed.

Suddenly - strong feelings hit him.

A torrent of emotions.

What had been stored up until then, the so called "Nostalgia" that was being suppressed, literally started to flow out like a huge waterfall into Saito's head.

The girl who sat next to him at school.

The best friend with whom he used to play.

Every person he forgot about, their faces floated into his memory.

He remembered the face of the physical education teacher who used to punish him. He missed even those people.

“What's wrong?”

“…They're returning. Returning.”

Saito coughed out.

When he recalled his hometown, he started to cry…

Indeed, the fake motive he had to stay in this world had disappeared.

Since he came to this world, more than one year had passed.

I want to return home.

I want to drink miso soup.

I want to meet my friends.

I want to go to school.

I want to browse the Internet...

What had been hidden deep inside for such a long time… Saito felt it all break free, with loud cracking sounds.

He recalled Cattleya’s words from before,

“When shocking events happen, a human has the ability to lock their mind.”

And just then, the lock came off.

Saito was crying… sobbing painfully.

“What’s wrong?”

Tabitha asked him.

Saito looked at the runes on his left hand absent-mindedly.

“The runes look different…”

Derflinger, who was leaning against the bed, answered,

“Because Tiffania erased the fake motive to stay in this world that was within you, it has affected your familiar abilities as well."

“…Then shouldn’t they have been erased altogether?”

Saito said while watching the faded runes.

“That’s true somewhat. Runes react to your mind’s state. Because you just lost the reason to stay in this world, the turmoil in your mind was reflected on your runes.”

Absent-mindedly, Saito said in a far away voice,

“Hey Derf...”

“What?”

“My… my feelings for Louise — were they also fake, created by the familiar’s runes?”

Derflinger thought about it for a while

“Well, that's not for me to know. It's the way partner’s heart feels.”

“Well, if that’s the case… then it will be my true choice, I guess.”

“I guess, it will be the true choice.”

Louise and others walked down the road to Rosais.

“Isn’t Rosais 50 leagues away still? Walking such a distance is way too demanding.”

“It can’t be helped. It is because Tabitha decided to stay... Will she help Saito search for the way back to his home place, far away?”

Louise grew silent and started to quietly bite her lips.

“What is it? I already knew the truth. Saito is a human from another world. Jean told me.”

Kirche stole a glance at Louise.

“However, aren’t you a bit too cold? Leaving behind Saito, whom has no place to go to.”

Reticent Louise, said nothing.

“Say Louise…”

“What?”

“Could you tell me one thing… you learned how to act like a mature woman by wearing alluring underwear. But why do you tell such lies?”

“I wasn’t lying.”

Kirche placed a hand on top of Louise’s head, and patted gently.

“Honestly, you are just scared.”

“What?”

“You did not want to see… that Saito’s feelings for you were just some familiar’s delusion. Therefore you could not face it and just ran away.”

“You are wrong.”

“When Tabitha said ‘I’ll stay’ you wanted to stay with her, didn’t you? Why did you leave?

“That’s wrong. The only reason I was reluctant is because I wanted to bring Tiffania to princess-sama quickly, as ordered. So, when Tabitha said she’d stay, I was reluctant to leave her behind.”

“That is an excuse that only you believe.”

“It’s not an excuse.”

“Let’s suppose that Saito’s feelings for you were just some delusion, what will you do?”

“Nothing much. I’ll just search for a way to take him home in any case - that’s what.”

“And what if those are Saito’s true feelings?”

“I-I’ll l-look for a way to take him home.”

“And now you are acting flustered.”

“Not flustered. I am not flustered!”

“You are such an easy to read child. You are deeply in love with Saito, aren’t you?”

“You are wrong! Idiot!”

“Hey Louise, now you are acting cowardly. Even if the feelings of the person that loved you are fake, it is not the same with you... Just this time you will have

to rely on your own charm.”

“…what?! I am not in love!”

Louise said while pouting.

It is not love. I am not in love with him.

Louise repeated this many times in her mind, trying to persuade herself.

That can’t be so...

Why would I love a guy like him? Certainly, it’s just me feeling jealous about my familiar.

That’s right, I feel those feelings only because he is my familiar.

But though she was repeating it over and over again… tears were still falling from Louise’s eyes.

But why would I cry so hard then?

I am just a coward – Louise thought.

Even facing enemies was less scary than this.

‘Saito’s feelings for me were just some delusion’ – there was nothing scarier than that.

That’s why I ran away, tail between my legs.

Could it be that Saito’s ‘I love you’ was just another fake motive to stay in this world?

Then, all the moments she and Saito shared… were nothing but a lie.

To put it simply, all her treasured memories would turn into a lie.

If that were to happen, then I would die – Louise thought.

The most important thing in this world for her… would turn into nothing.

That’s why she could not face it.

Louise rubbed her eyes.

Guiche, who was walking in the back of the group, mumbled to himself.

“It is saddening somewhat, though I agreed to erase Saito’s ‘false motive to stay in this world’… when I think about it may be a bad thing to do.”

This way Saito might lose the balance of his spirit. Though not willing to return is not a healthy thing either, but what happens when he cannot go back?

Then he would not have the usual strength to deal with it.

The ‘fake motive to stay in this world’ would be replaced with ‘looking for the way to go back’… And when his familiar’s spirit balance is gone, what extreme measures may Saito take?

However, looking for the various ways may not be bad. But what if they never find a way for Saito to return…

Guiche tried to imagine himself as a familiar.

However, his imagination was blank.

Well, umm, from where did Saito come?

He said that he came from the Rub' al Khali side.

Well.

If I was now summoned to Rub' al Khali….

“Hmmm.”

Guiche cocked his head.

He could not imagine it. Guiche only knew Halkeginia and thus he could not imagine other lands correctly.

“Lets replace bar with a castle then.”

But even so he could not grasp it. He should have taken his lessons more seriously.

Because there is no other way, let’s just imagine the girl I like for now.

Weeell…

First of all, it has to be a girl.

And another girl.

Darn, it has to be a single girl…

Final girl.

Tsk, it’s no good – forget it…

“First thing - she has to be cute, yes.”

Guiche hit his thigh.

What?! If I were summoned to some place by a cute girl I would not return at all!

Guiche, upon realizing the truth, ran to Louise, who was still devastated, to tell her about it.

However, something was touching his shoulder.

"Hmm? Who is it. I'm busy now. Just tell me about it later."

That thing prodded his shoulder again.

"Seriously, who's touching my shoulder?"

Guiche looked at everyone in front of him.

"Hmm, Louise is here, Kirche too. Even that half-elf girl called Tiffania is here too , then who could it be behind me!"

Guiche clapped his hands together.

It must be Saito! Yeah, that's right. Eh, you came back? By the way, that Tiffania girl really does have unusually big boobs, just like what you've said!

I, Guiche, feel the need to personally check if they are the real deal. Don't you agree?

“Who are you? Hey, you!”

Then Guiche turned around and let out a loud shriek.

“Giyaaa

“Oh, you remember me? I’m honored.”

Startled, she looked up at the head of the figure - that was where the voice came from. Was she there? Or was she in a different place?

Perhaps the latter.

The Myoznitnirn was the Familiar of Void, master of dolls. She wouldn’t be fighting herself.

“What do you want?”

“I came to express my gratitude. After all, the other day, you stole our princess so well.”

“What princess?! You imprisoned her and tried to break her will!”

“Break will? Oh, and you are different? Breaking your familiar’s will is not that different. Look what nice effects it had on Alviss.”

Louise set up the wand and uttered an incantation.

But… there was still no ‘Void’.

Meanwhile, Guiche gathered himself, and recited a spell as well.

Seven bronze armored maidens appeared.

“Valkyries! Attack him!”

The seven bronze maidens of war aimed their short spears at the huge fencer figure.

Yet… the short spears snapped.

“Hey… do you seriously think that such puny golems could hurt Jörmungand?”

The huge golem called Jörmungand lifted its foot with ease.

And he smashed the seven valkyries like insects. Next, Kirche recited her fire magic.

A huge fireball hit the Jörmungand, but even that couldn’t leave a scratch on the armor. The thick armor was impenetrable.

“Useless. It’s a mistake to think that you can hurt the Jörmungand with elemental magic.”

Jörmungand took a step forward. Was there a person inside? It was walking too smoothly for a golem.

Surprisingly, despite its huge body, one could hardly hear the footsteps. It was prowling like a cat.

“How can this golem…”

“Golem? How rude. The Jörmungand is not some golem!”

Jörmungand lifted the sword and smashed it hard against the ground next to Louise and others.

The earth shook from the impact.

“Kiyaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa!”

Louise and her friends fell on the ground.

Jörmungand’s arm penetrated the cloud of dust, gripped Louise, and lifted her up.

“Hn…”

Freezing fear gripped Louise’s heart.

“Sai-”

She almost called out Saito’s name.

But… she choked the name down before it left her lips.

I have no right to call his name.

I won’t hide behind the fake heart.

Louise courageously stared at the Jörmungand.

“Hm?”

Worried, Saito could see a gigantic knight figure with his left eye. His left eye vision was shaky. He could see Guiche and others from high above.

He could see through Louise’s eyes.

This ability activated itself only when his master was in danger…

“Really… what mess did she get into this time?”

Seeing the somehow frightening knight figure raging about, Saito spoke in a nonchalant voice.

Derflinger, who was leant against the bed side, called out to Saito.

“Is it about the young lass?”

“Yeah. I can see it with my left eye.”

“Same way. Though I will say it clearly – if you don’t love her, don’t go. The undecided Gandálfr is just a burden. It would be useless to go. If you are not sure – don’t get involved.”

Saito took a deep breath.

“While you were at it, you could have erased my familiar's ability as well.”

“What for?”

“So then we wouldn't need to go anywhere.”

Derflinger clattered while laughing.

“Chigeegee.”

Saito stood up, taking Derflinger with him.

“Let's go, Tabitha.”

“Partner, do you love that young lass?”

Saito said in clear voice.

“It’s useless. She’s so unlovable. That girl is selfish, stupid and haughty… Moreover, lately she’s been really needy to be complimented by me. When I think about it – she is completely unlovable. She’s always angry. And we do nothing but argue most of the time. It’s so annoying.”

“Then why are you going to save her?”

“… because whenever I look at this girl, my heart beats like crazy. From the first sight my whole life has been cursed. If I had known her character this wouldn’t have happened. Yeah, I would have lead a untroubled life then… eh?”

Shocked, Saito looked at Tabitha.

“Now, did you just smile?”

“Imagining things.”

“Hey, you smiled! Hey!”

Sylphid appeared by the window. Tabitha quickly mounted it. Holding Derflinger in his hand, Saito perched on Sylphid as well.

“Hold tight. We’ll fly fast.”

Tabitha said in a casual voice.

Louise struggled violently, held by Jörmungand.

“Let go! Let me go!”

“You say to let you go, but we just met.”

Louise was brought closer to Jörmungand’s face. Within the old-fashioned fencer’s helmet was burning a pale light surrounded by the darkness. It seemed to be completely hollow.

Jörmungand looked like the one-eyed demon from the southern lands. Louise trembled.

“Hey hey, This fellow has Ancient and Void, two magic elements mixed in it. What you are you getting scared for?”

“Why did you make such a monster?”

“Well. Maybe it’s because you are a mage that you do not understand. Familiars cannot judge a thing. Familiars act upon their master’s orders. Nothing more than that.“

“You are wrong!”

Louise shouted.

“Even a familiar is a living being! It’s not something that just follows its master’s orders blindly! That would be just a golem!”

“A mage’s words mean nothing. Even you treated your own familiar that way!”

“I was different! We were a team! Anyways, you are a coward! Stop hiding yourself and come out! Stop using puppets to do your fights! What is your goal!? Tell me!”

“What a troublesome lass! Just use your ‘Void’ already!”

With these words Louise realized.

What does she want me to use ‘Void’ for? Of course, now I cannot use it anyway.

But… for some unknown reason, she wants me to use ‘Void’, I guess I could use it to my benefit and avoid being crushed.

“Sorry, but I cannot meet your expectations. I will aim my wand only when my

opponent is a noble. I won’t use my spells on a shady character like you.”

“Say what?!”

Jörmungand squeezed hard. Louise’s face contorted with pain.

“Louise!”

Looking down she saw Kirche, Guiche, Tiffania, and the kids anxiously looking upwards.

“Run away!”

Louise shouted.

“But, but…!”

“Don’t worry about me! Take Tiffania and the children and run away! Please!”

Kirche nodded and urged Tiffania and the children to come with her.

Yet…

“I won’t let you go!”

Holding Louise in its hand, Jörmungand jumped up. Louise was surprised by the lightness that did not suit such a gigantic figure. It seemed like prowling was not the only thing it could do.

That thing was like a human, just much larger! Jörmungand landed in front of Kirche and the others, blocking their path.

“Don’t disregard me thinking that you can run away. Next time you try to escape, I will simply crush you without mercy.”

“Even the children?!”

“Yeah. If you are together I will have no choice but to crush you all, right? Maybe it would be better to separate?”

Louise trembled after hearing such words. She slowly started to sing.

“Seems like you are going to cast ‘Void’ after all.”

“W-what are you saying! I won’t cast! Didn’t I tell you! Only if a noble opponent…”

“Such a boring lie. You had plenty of chances to cast it. Yet you did not, you waste. You are so useless.”

Jörmungand threw Louise to the ground.

In an instant Kirche cast the ‘Levitation’, but the softening was marginal. Jörmungand’s power blocked the elemental spell.

Although her fall was slowed down a bit, Louise still slammed hard against the ground. Her body was in intense pain.

She could not breath! She could not move!

“Well then, I will trample you. Say your prayers, ant.”

Jörmungand raised its foot. Louise closed her eyes shut.

‘Zun’ – a sound echoed… and the cloud of dust lifted again.

Feeling no ground underneath her, Louise opened her eyes.

Louise was riding Sylphid’s back, who had rescued the girl in the nick of time before she was crushed underneath Jörmungand’s foot.

“What’s the meaning of thi-?”

She asked in a surprised voice turning around. And saw Saito sitting there.

Louise’s eyes opened wide and she shouted.

“W-what are you doing here?! I didn’t call for you!”

Then she turned to Tabitha.

“Tabitha! Didn't you say you’d help Saito find a way for him to return home?!”

“I was told to help you instead.”

‘Tsun’ – Louise crossed her hands and declared.

“…Really, Tiffania’s magic is so ineffective! Otherwise why would this idiot be coming this way!?”

“Its effective. Very effective. Honestly, it put me into a half slumber. What about this world? Does it have Internet? Impossible. Is there a burger bar? Not a chance! Yeah, getting drunk is the only thing of note in here. What a shame. And it’s all your fault, Louise the Zero-san!”

“Eh?”

“Hush, really that’s too much… Now, I would still rather be here. Whaat, void? Whaat, fake memory? I recall it now thanks to you. I recalled what had been lost for a year. Look, aren’t these tears? They’re because I cannot find a way back!”

Saito pointed at his puffy eyes.

Louise turned her face away.

“T-that’s not good. I’ll find a way to take you back! Mo, and stop talking trash about my world!”

“Yeah, thanks to you I cleared the mist off my eyes. Really, there are still things left for me to do in this world. Whether it is the Void or Holy Land – I will find a way myself. I will go back. Yeah, I will return!”

“Stupid! Stupidstupidstupid! Then go fast! I will not be alone!”

“Yes. Such an angry thing you are, but look, hey, there is Kirche, Guiche, and Tiffania. Princess-sama and Siesta. Even Tabitha’s mother. Do not think the world revolves around you alone. I only came here to help my friends!”

“Wha-?”

“I want to help this world the best I can! I understood that! Because, before being Gandálfr, I am a human first! Because I am Hiraga Saito!”

Blood rushed into Louise's head. For some reason, her pride took the best of her.

"Me? What about me then!? I do not have a place in there!? What? Did you only say you love me because you are a familiar? Saitooo!"

Saito shouted, beyond angry.

"Listen you! How long can I keep telling 'I love you' to a girl who does not return my feelings?! I should be getting a medal for this!"

"Eh?"

"What's so good about you? No one would take notice of you - you are haughty like hell, you kick around when you sleep, you do not wear panties, one only can say 'I love you' to you out of pity for the bust-handicapped girl, really. There's nothing else to praise you for. When I ignore you, you try to provoke me calling it a familiar's 'reward', but when I misunderstand and drool about it, you put me down with insults. Your head is as much of a zero as your chest is, idiot. Realize the reality, peach-haired fool."

"That, t-this…don't say that… are you saying such terrible things because of turmoil? Because I did act bad, I will forgive you this time, but usually I would kill you three times for such words, understand?"

"Shut up! Therefore my love for you is just sympathy for a pathetic girl, as well as an unwilling familiar's attachment. I won't follow you around. Hereafter, I'll be on my own."

"Looking forward to that! Very cruel! Cruel! Too cruel!"

Louise shouted, shaking her head.

"Oi! I need some help there!"

Guiche's voice came from below. Looking down, they saw him in the hand of Jörmungand, groaning in pain. Meanwhile, Kirche and Tiffania were taking the chance and getting the children out of there.

"Seems like you turned into bait, didn't you, commanding officer. Let's save the praises. Wait!"

With a cry, Saito jumped off Sylphid.

At the same time he slashed the sword down at the hand that was holding Guiche.

However, with a loud sound, Saito’s sword was repelled.

“Cut!”

The next moment, Jörmungand’s hand lifted above Saito, as if trying to smash an annoying mosquito. Saito kicked off the Jörmungand’s hand and managed to avoid the formidable palm.

“Ku!”

Doing a somersault, Saito landed on the ground. At the same time, Jörmungand’s feet moved at an incredible speed, trying to step on Saito.

Rolling to the side, Saito avoided the foot.

“What’s this?! What kind of golem is this?! It’s way too fast!”

The speed was fundamentally different compared to the time he fought Fouquet’s golem.

If Fouquet's golem was a turtle, then this Jörmungand was a cat.

Of course, not just a cat. Steel arms and legs, and a gigantic figure… It all combined into a human-like dexterity.

With just the right timing, Saito jumped back.

Jörmungand pulled out the sword from its waist.

“It even has a weapon like that?!”

Holding its big sword, Jörmungand swung downwards, aiming at Saito.

Saito dodged to the side, but it seemed to have read his movements completely.

Jörmungand lifted its left hand over the right shoulder - there were three small

throwing knives hidden between its skillful fingers.

However, even if they were called throwing knives, they were the size of a big sword.

Something that could cut humans into pieces!

Though Saito managed to avoid the first two, he had to parry off the third with his sword.

Not giving him a break, Jörmungand lowered his sword.

A frightening speed.

Somehow Saito managed to dodge the four weapon attack and hit Jörmungand’s foot.

However… only an empty sound echoed from the place where the sword hit.

“Derf , cut him!”

“This fellow is using ‘Counter’.”

“That’s what elves use!”

Saito recalled the battle at Alhambra castle.

Then… only Louise’s ‘Dispel’ could penetrate this armor!

“So because of the big amount of ‘Counter’ used, it is impossible to penetrate the armor.”

“You say too many useless things!”

Dodging to the side from the fist, Saito shouted.

Feeling uneasy, Louise was watching Saito's fight from Tabitha’s Sylphid.

Saito’s sword was not damaging Jörmungand in the slightest!

“What to do… Saito will lose at this rate…”

Tabitha turned to Louise.

“Void.”

“I can’t use it!”

“Why?”

“Not enough willpower!”

“Gather it.”

“Without sleeping I cannot restore it!”

After thinking about it for a while… Tabitha suddenly made Sylphid dive down towards Saito. Then she recited ‘Levitation’ and caught him up in the air.

“What?! Are you running away?! But even if you try to run away, as quick as this thing is, it will catch us in no time! Besides there are children too!” Saito shouted, suddenly being interrupted during the fight.

“You cannot win just by yourself.”

“No, it isn’t true!”

“Silence.”

Tabitha said as if trying to focus.

“Yes?”

Then Tabitha informed Saito, loud enough so that Louise would hear that too.

“Let us continue from where we left off.”

“Ha? Continue what?! Even though I don’t understand, right now it is no-ghm!”

Saito could not finish the sentence.

Because…

Tabitha's lips pressed tightly against his.

"Mh…nmh…"

Saito's eyes widened from the shock of the sudden kiss.

Moreover Tabitha, in a bold act that didn't suit her reserved personality, entwined her tongue with his. To show it Louise, Tabitha sucked loudly on Saito's tongue.

Louise blankly stared at the spectacle before her, as if not able to understand it.

Her mind could not follow the sudden event.

However… when Tabitha's lips touched Saito's, it certainly was a kiss.

Louise's shoulders started to tremble like during an earthquake.

"Y-youuu… s-s-s-such thing…"

Then Tabitha's hand slowly embraced Saito's neck and pulled him tight against her. Her tiny body pressed hard against Saito.

Louise's mind recalled Tabitha's words.

"Moreover, c-c-c-continuing from where y-you left oooooooooooooooooooooooooooff?!"

In other words, they were doing such things behind Louise's back.

Louise's pink hair stood up, her eyes set aflame. Her body was filled with a violent burning anger.

Since her anger rose to the utmost limit, a great willpower was generated and Louise's body was wrapped in an aura of magic.

After confirming that the heat haze of magic was rising from Louise's body,

Tabitha quickly separated herself from Saito.

“Now.”

Louise turned to them and started chanting a spell.

Is Naudiz Wunjo Jera…

Derflinger shouted.

“That’s not a Dispel! It cannot penetrate the armor! Explosion will be repelled!”

The runes that Louise started to chant were the ones for ‘Explosion’.

Because this was the spell that Louise was the most familiar with.

Eoh Thorn Feoh Járnsaxa

Is the anger the source of my power?

While uttering an incantation, Louise thought.

For a long time I… had lived with so much anger stored in me?

Ós Thorn Uruz Ru Rad

With anger… blossomed other feelings.

Peordh Yr Sowilo Kaun Othila

She was too scared to admit them.

Louise, who completed the spell, turned to them.

After finishing the cantrip, not having a place to go, the magic began to run through her body. The magic was in her shoulders, arms, palms, fingers, in the tip of her wand… Louise shot the explosion.

White light appeared at one spot of Jörmungand’s armor.

“Uo…”

Saito groaned.

Tabitha’s eyes also opened wide watching the light.

Light kept on growing until it swallowed the whole Jörmungand.

At the same time, Jörmungand’s armor kept on swelling like a balloon… then an earth shattering explosion rang.

Jörmungand, as if stuffed with dynamite from the inside, exploded. Remains of armor scattered all over the place.

When the last parts of Jörmungand came smoking down, Kirche and the others ran out from hiding.

“Saito! Louise! You are not burnt, are you?”

“No way! You were great! To beat such a monster!”

“That’s good… I thought we were going to die so soon after leaving the village!”

Guiche, Kirche, and Tiffania took Saito's hand and jumped with joy. Children ran up and encircled them.

After a while, when the first wave of joy passed… Kirche and Guiche looked at Saito with serious expressions on their faces.

“…sorry, but did you want to take part in this? Though you helped a lot in defeating this big thing…”

Saito answered in a really tired voice.

“Nonsense. Never apologize again. I did what I wanted to do.”

Kirche and Guiche smiled.

“Kiyaa! It was miserable! And clumsy!”

“But as expected from Saito!”

“Now you are making fun of me…”

Among this friendly chatter, there was a sole girl whose shoulders were trembling.

It was Louise.

With small steps she approached Saito and, interrupting his joyful talk with Guiche, pulled his ear.

“W-what is it?!”

Louise smiled. However, her lips were trembling.

“What was that about?”

“Eh?”

Louise's eyes blazed up brightly.

“Continuing from where you left off?”

Saito panicked.

“Idiot! That was just Tabitha’s clever trick.”

“Well. I understand it. The dog acts like a dog. But what interests me are those emotional, ugly things you said. Yes, surely it came from you rather than a familiar…”

Eyes burning like demons, like a bird of prey carrying its victim to the nest, Louise dragged Saito to the bushes.

Saito’s screams echoed long in the vast, blue sky of Albion.

Meanwhile, hiding itself from the party, a shadow collected Jörmungand’s armor.

It was Myoznitnirn. She held a piece of the torn armor like a valuable treasure.

“The armor endured such an explosion… I wonder what else one can do with elf magic? Indeed, it may be very interesting.”

She said to herself.

Epilogue

On board of the ship traveling from Rosais to Tristain, Saito was having a nightmare while lying in the cabin's bed.

He had received more damage from the fight with Jörmungand than Louise.

"Ugh, ugh" - although he was having a nightmare, somehow Saito was feeling refreshed. He had now somewhat straightened up his feelings on the things he had to do.

Thinking about this and that, Saito was gazing at the ceiling…

Knock knock

Someone knocked against the door.

"Who is it?"

"It's me." Answered Louise's voice.

"…it's open." He said in an ill-tempered voice, and with an awkward expression on her face, Louise stepped in.

"Excuse me. Just in case, I came to check. Are you alright?"

"You… hit me more than enough already."

Louise pouted and said in a sulky tone.

"Y-you were the one who was wrong. You said you love me only as a familiar. I-it was a lie wasn't it? Truly. You love me, right?"

She sounded almost desperate.

Saito glared at Louise and said.

“Such a thing can be said to anyone. As a noble.”

“S-still, you love me?”

“I don’t dislike you.”

“So you like me?”

“Isn’t that the opposite? Aren’t you the one who likes me?”

“N-n-n-n-n-n-no way!”

Blushing Louise, whirled her hands fast.

“So, were you not this jealous because you love me? And you even amassed your willpower so quickly because you were angry I was kissed. It’s so obvious.”

“Uuuuuh” Louise let out a half-sobbing groan and nodded.

“…Really. It might be so.”

“…Huh?” Surprised, Saito stared at Louise. Seeing him like this, Louise once again gave a triumphant ‘nya’ smile.

“No way. The dog is drooling again.”

“Y-you cheated!”

“And you got all ‘dokidoki’ from that. Idiot.”

Saito turned to the other side to hide his embarrassment and said.

“Really… I’ll just gradually find a way to return home. And then I will definitely drink miso soup.”

“What is miso soup?”

“My country’s soup.”

Then Louise gently said.

“I too would like to drink soup from Saito’s country.”

Saito’s cheek turned redder than from a kiss.

Louise became embarrassed as well and turned the other way.

“It may be very difficult, however… for the moment, the way things are, I would like for you to continue helping us.”

Though she said it calmly, Louise was burning with emotion on the inside.

Surely after all this, Saito will deny such a pledge with curses.

‘Why should I do such a thing?’

Why doesn’t Saito say such words.

That time… he saved her from Fouquet’s golem.

And that day, he came to Louise’s rescue again…

That’s why behind his snappish words, Louise felt Saito’s love. And then, when he went through Tiffania’s spell… It wasn’t a familiar’s affection, but genuine love.

However, why do I still doubt? That it isn’t given by a familiar magic? Why can’t I get rid of this fear?

…because I am still not confident in myself.

Because I am not confident, I refuse to accept my feelings and doubt Saito's words. Therefore, all I can say are such things – while thinking so, Louise shyly said.

“I-I am being manipulated too.”

“Eh?”

“I hold affection for my familiar as well. That’s why I felt such burning jealousy,

even though I did not want to. Really.”

Louise placed her palms on both of Saito's cheeks and suddenly brought her lips close to his.

“Eh? Eeh? Nmh…”

Two pair of lips slowly melted with each other.

Gently tracing Saito’s lips with her own, Louise thought absent mindedly while kissing.

When I used Void, why was I so angry?

Was it because… Saito did that with another girl? Apparently, it recharged real fast. What an annoying willpower – Louise thought.

Besides I got angry from the bottom of my heart.

It was hateful, it was painful… however, there was nothing I could do…

Louise’s lips kissed the corner of his mouth before pressing themselves hard against his lips again.

After continuing kissing him wildly for a while… Louise suddenly pulled her lips away from his, catching her breath.

“Poor me - I have been manipulated by the Void to feel an attraction towards my familiar. I am such a poor girl.”

After saying those words, Louise leaned in and passionately recaptured his lips again.

While kissing her lips repeatedly… Saito understood that Louise’s words were a lie.

It was painfully obvious.

Louise’s kisses were increasingly feverish and hot.

Hot because her feelings for Saito were spoken out loud.

The moment he saw the lower half of the Albion continent covered by a white cloud from their ship, Saito mused.

Was… Tiffania’s magic really effective against me?

Originally this ‘Fake motive’ might have been nothing more than, in Cattleya’s words, ‘the locked mind’.

Well, when he thought about it, it may have been just showing off Saito's natural optimism.

Something that even your own heart is not aware off.

However, he knew one thing for sure.

Looking at Louise always made his heart beat fast. Even Tiffania’s magic could not change that – it still remained the same.

Saito recalled a dream he saw in Tiffania’s house.

That time, Saito’s mother had asked him.

“Haven’t you forgotten something?”

After all, the meaning of a man’s existence, was to protect the girl that made his heart beat hard.

Even at the cost of his life.

That was all that there was to it.

That was what Saito thought, inside the ship drifting further away from Albion, and continuing to exchange passionate kisses with Louise.